

# Marriage and Childbearing: Gender Stereotyping in two African Female Writings

Joseph Peter Yaw-kan  
Jonas Naoh Xaxier Gambil  
Daniel Yaw Akor  
Mark Kpatiewiizi Donwaazum

Department of English Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

## Abstract

African female writers feel unperturbed reverberating the socially signified identity constructions of the female gender in the male contested society today. Their literary pieces seek gender parity by deepening understanding of the social responsibilities of the female compared to their male counterparts. This essay examines the context of gender stereotyping in two African female writings. Specifically, it undertakes a reading of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970) and Doreen Baingana's *Tropical Fish* (2005). By drawing insight from Lorber's (1994) social construction theory and using content analysis, the study analyzes the social construct of Aidoo's heroine, *Anowa* and Baingana's heroine Christine in both texts as socially conditioned characters pottered for marriage and childbearing. The paper argues that marriage and childbearing are traditional, customary and socially acceptable roles and conventions created for the female gender in the society. The paper reveals that such gendered roles were socially policed by the society of the female characters in the texts, and therefore, could not be skipped. The paper is a contribution to the studies on gender roles of female characters in literary texts.

**Keywords:** gender stereotyping, female writings, marriage, social construct

## 1. Introduction

Since the upsurge of African female writings, African literary writers and critics have not shied from confronting the marginalization of the female gender. The likes of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, Nadine Gordimer, and Doreen Baingana, to mention but a few, are iconic writers and critics who have received scathing criticism for their expressed positions on the marginal space assigned to the female gender (Sam, 2021). Nevertheless, such scathing attacks have never put them off in speaking for gender equity, equality and parity. Ama Ata Aidoo, one of Ghana's most iconic female writers, in particular continues to remain a continental literary colossus who has not been afraid to confront the challenges of the Black female in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings. The overall goal of these female writers is to achieve gender parity. One dynamic approach to achieving this ultimate goal is embedded in the male challenging roles they assign to female characters in their oeuvres.

Attempting to shift the focus from the male to the female, most of these African female writers have iconized female characters through character/gender stereotyping. This essay examines the context of gender stereotyping in two African female writings. Reading Aidoo's eponymous drama, *Anowa* and Baingana's *Tropical Fish* presents a sociological overtone.

However, going beyond the issues of sociology, the two aforementioned texts have a literary significance (Opoku-Agyemang, 1997).

Situated within the context of the present study, studies on character and characterization in literary texts are increasingly gaining attention in academia in the past few years. Such body of scholarly works demonstrate the aesthetic significance of characterization in drama and novels (Sam, 2021; Mwinlaaru, 2014). Significantly, the studies illustrate that novelists and dramatists use characters to convey various ideas, themes or subject matter, and characterization enables an understanding of the roles and development of characters (Mwinlaaru, 2014). With characterization, readers are able to harmonize their interpretation of the ontological worldview from which literary authors write about the society. It also aids readers, not only to visualize characters but to also understand how fictional develop and evolve in the world of fiction. In other words, readers keep touch with the fictional world through the significant roles characters' play assigned by literary authors to unravel the central messages they seek to communicate. Nonetheless, characterization has proven to be another effective way authors give meanings and substance to their themes (Mwinlaaru, 2014).

In most of the African female writings, there is an enduring attempt to project the real world of the female character; give voice to the female in the patriarchal society; and shape misogynistic society's view on the female gender. This is achieved through a particular effort of developing and modelling a female character to perform a unique role in their texts (drama or novel). These enduring scholarly efforts have attracted attention (see Sam, 2021).

Gender stereotyping being an issue of concern in the literary circles, more than half of most of the published works on women and/or the female gender in the past few years have questioned how African literary writers in particular, present their female characters in their fictions. In recent publications, Sam (2021) and Kopytoff (2005), amongst other scholars, report that the African female writer has tended to create "stereotypical images in the case of the woman" in their writings (Sam, 2021, p.67). In essence, how female characters are created and portrayed does appear to reflect the social construction of the female gender in the traditional society. They, are represented to be "child bearers", marriage products, objects of abuse, subjugation and commodification, and/or perform other stereotypical female roles and responsibilities (Kopytoff, 2005, p.130). These roles are primarily social constructs in the patriarchal society. A careful reading of Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970) and Baingana's *Tropical Fish* (2005) with particular attention paid to how their central characters, Anowa and Christine are respectively represented points towards the social construct debate. Aidoo in particular registers a voice on how the fictional Akan society constructs the female gender (Ennin, 2014). With Baingana, the role of the female in the Ugandan traditional society under the Idi Amin regime is brought to light (Fallon, 2006). Thus, in both texts, the central characters are victims of the traditional society ruled by men.

Aidoo's *Anowa* and Baingana's *Tropical Fish*, since their publication in 1970 and 2005 respectively, have received a considerable quantity of scholarly attention. Scholarly works on Aidoo's female character presentation in *Anowa* present an idealized illiterate female (Ekpong, 2011; Djimet & Koussouhon, 2020). On Baingana's *Tropical Fish*, the socio-economic hardship and gender ideologies of female characters are examined by Charalambous (2012) and Nansubuga (2021). Charalambous (2012), for instance, comments that Christine,

Baingana's heroine, is defined by her trade value as a woman. On Christine, she notes that "Her cynicism arises from an ingrained awareness that in traditional society her prospects and status as a woman are defined by her 'trade value'. Her desires and unique personal qualities hardly count. In the struggle of 'real life' she must submit to male-dominated institutions, embrace the male ethos of transactional exchange, and attract a husband who can offer her an advantageous future" (p.250). Nansubuga's (2021) study considers trauma as a socially inflicted pain on the female in the Ugandan society under Ami's dictatorship and notes that such socially inflicted pain drives the female into reacting in ways that will bring relief to them such as walking away from marriages. From our reading, a sustained paper on how the two protagonist female characters, Anowa and Christine in Aidoo's *Anowa* and Baingana's *Tropical Fish*, respectively, have been constructed and conditioned for marriage and childbearing, is missing. How the traditional society conditions the female characters in both texts to conform to such expected feminine roles offers an insight into how Aidoo and Baingana visualize the woman as a constructed image in their societies.

The focus of the present paper, therefore, is to explore the social construct of these two female characters in the two selected texts. We propose that this social construct will enable the reader to understand how African female writers of drama and novel give voice to how socio-cultural norms and values in the traditional society construct the identity of the female gender. This paper is in part a feminist reading of Aidoo's drama and Baingana's novel though it is placed within the theoretical lens of social construction of gender. Emphasis is placed on the gender roles of the female characters, Anowa and Christine, who are socially conditioned to do gender, and how this conditioning impacts their social relationship with others. The texts of Aidoo and Baingana were selected in order to investigate how these female writers present their female characters, and to assess the diversity of socio-cultural norms that create the identity of the female in these socially diverse societies of the two female writers.

## 2. Literature Review

In this section, we present related studies which help us to locate the relationship the present study shares with the extant literature. We further present the theoretical approach which casts light on the analysis of this essay.

There is a substantial body of studies on Aidoo's *Anowa*. Most of the scholarly works on *Anowa* have explored femininity and gender dynamics in the text (Behrent, 1997; Djimet & Koussouhon, 2020); Woman-centered Pan-Africanism and Madness (Osaki, 2002; Kumavie, 2011); and the illiterate female (Appiah et al., 2021); colonial themes (Karavanta, 2001) and other thematic concerns (Lambert, 2005; Ennin 2014; Ameen, 2017). For instance, Osaki (2002) studies the theme of madness in four selected female writings including *Anowa*. According to Osaki (2002, p.4) the concept of madness is rife in Black female writings and a common problem. Anowa as a character, Osaki (2002, p.11) observes, is driven into madness by Kofi Ako. It underscores the fact that patriarchy is an established social institution which is behind Anowa's madness in the text. Appiah et al. (2021), on the other hand, identify Aidoo's *Anowa* as a satire, satirizing societal weaknesses. Appiah et al. (2021) claim that *Anowa* presents illiterate female characters who are unwilling to consider societal problems from a wider viewpoint because they are adamant about upholding their traditions. The paper

concludes by asserting that this is a flaw which impedes transformation on the part of the female character at all levels in the traditional society.

In the paper *Rethinking the Specter: Ama Ata Aidoo's Anowa*, Karavanta (2001) analyzes Aidoo's *Anowa* and reports that the text addresses the issue of colonialism and the start of the migration of white wealth into the Gold Coast region from a variety of perspectives. Karavanta (2001, p.6) reveals that an intricate network of sociopolitical difficulties, gender issues, and the question of origins and home are all addressed by *Anowa's* nomadic voyage as she enters and exits from two locales, the Yebi village and Kofi Ako's Big House. Kumbalonah (2013) also explores the culture of language in *Anowa* and argues that there is both a social and natural connect between language and culture. In reading *Anowa*, Kumbalonah (2013) asserts that semantics is relevant to the social construction of language used by non-literate Akan speakers like Osam and Badua in the text.

Ennin (2014) examines hegemonic masculinity in Aidoo's *Anowa* and indicates that the hegemonic masculinity in the text is a social practice which makes men like Osam and Kofi Ako to be domineering. Ennin (2014) claims that "the people of Yebi in *Anowa* esteem hard work and perceive it as the path to wealth and power, and subsequently hegemony (p.59). The paper further argues that Aidoo

Creates a type of hegemonic masculinity that is destructive, as it provides avenues for men to quickly achieve it by exploiting their own people. Thus, the actions of Kofi Ako indicate how domineering, destructive, and oppressive it is to embody this hegemony. His portrayal also criticizes society for refusing to provide and accept other modes of masculine identity that are liberating to both men and women and to offer avenues for growth and development (pp.59-60).

Djimet and Koussouhon (2020) explore femininity in *Anowa*. According to Djimet and Koussouhon (2020), "the exchange between female characters and male characters is realized in a context of familiarity, equal power, and mutual respect; though men tend to be reluctant concerning their wives' assertiveness" (p.196). The paper concludes that the patriarchal structure is not wholly rejected by *Anowa*; rather, it is modified.

Critics and scholars have interrogated Baingana's work from varied perspectives. Most of the criticism of Baingana's *Tropical Fish* has concentrated on female sexuality and feminist considerations. Other recent studies have considered cultural patriarchy (Azuike, 2019; Vogtsberger, 2010; Azuike, 2015; Spencer, 2016; Mtenje, 2016; Nansubuga, 2021; Eze, 2016). For instance, Vogtsberger (2010) claims that *Tropical Fish* shares adolescent female characters and illustrate patriarchal dominance in both its extreme (incest, rape, domestic violence) and more subtle (the everyday performance of gender norms and heteronormativity) aspects" (p.11). Mtenje (2016) also looks at how Baingana depicts sex and female sexual agency in *Tropical Fish*. Mtenje (2016, p.164) pays attention to how Baingana's depiction of female sexual agency demonstrates the issues surrounding women's open expression of sexual desire and pleasure, as well as how such autonomy is ambiguously framed under challenged normative expectations of gender.

Azuike (2015) examines female sexuality in *Tropical Fish* among some selected African female writings. The paper questions the moral integrity of the female character in the selected texts. According to Azuike (2015), “sexual freedom, taken to an extreme can lead a woman to complete depravity, absolute disillusionment and the total destruction of self” (p.84). and claims that “female sexual autonomy will remain a mirage if it is such that dislocates the structure of the family, prohibits child-birth, condones prostitution and encourages the unbridled quest for a sexual freedom which promotes sexual immorality and which leads our current generation into self – immolation” (p.84). Similarly, Azuike (2019) assesses sexual autonomy by Baingana’s female characters who are described as ‘prostitute stereotypes’ (p.10). Azuike (2019) questions the stereotypical portrayal of women by female authors and suggests that “the stereotypical portrayal of women as deadly schemers, sexual predators, objects of pleasure and excessively talkative people amongst others should give way to new perspectives which portray them as intelligent and resourceful people who have contributed positively to nation building” (p.15).

Eze (2016) on the other hand, explores the ethical promises of the city in *Tropical Fish* and argues that the Los Angeles city offers Christine an insight into the patriarchal paradigms of her countryfolks who dwell in the city. The paper asserts that though Christine feels lost, her presence in ‘Lost in Los Angeles’ opens an opportunity to liberate herself from the “narrow authenticist construct of the Ugandan world” (p.135). Spencer (2016) looks at how Baingana “interrogates complex, paradoxical, ambiguous, and frequently contentious problems of home and exile with their associated difficulties of belonging and alienation/estrangement and how they are inextricably related to the maternal relationship” (p.174). According to Spencer (2014), Christine’s move to the city, where she is free from the constraints of home and the maternal gaze, can be viewed as a rite of passage that marks the end of her innocent youth and the beginning of maturity. (p.178). Mtenje (2016) investigates how Baingana portrays female sexuality by focusing on “the different degrees of co-option and coercion, containment and escape associated with representations of female bodies and sexualities” (p.26). The paper concludes that despite the fact that the female characters exercise agency in their choice of partners and in how they engage in sexual activity, they frequently fall back on gender-specific norms, which gives the impression that their agency is uncertain (Mtenje, 2016, p.35).

The review of related studies is relevant to the present essay. This is because the analysis and discussions of the present study will be situated within the extant literature. We have explored the extant literature on Aidoo’s *Anowa* and Baingana’s *Tropical Fish*. In the literature, it is evident that scholars and critics have paid extensive attention to the female character especially from feminist point of view. The critical conversation on female sexuality is relevant in both texts because of the authorial voices employed in the portrayal of female agency. It could, however, be seen that despite the plethora of literature on the female characters in both texts and the relevance of the social construct to academia, there is a dearth of studies on the specific gender stereotyping of Christine and Anowa.

### **3. Theoretical Lens**

Various theoretical approaches have been employed in the analysis of Aidoo’s *Anowa* in particular. Scholars have explored the postcolonial theoretical approach (Chakraborty, 2022;

Kumbalonah, 2013; Lambert, 2005; Karavanta, 2001); the existentialism approach (Appiah, et al. 2021); and the hegemonic masculinity theory (Ennin, 2014). On the other hand, Baingana's *Tropical Fish* has been dominantly read from Sexuality and Feminist perspectives (Mtenje, 2017; 2016) and (Spencer, 2016; 2014). Subsumed under the feminist approach, the analysis of the present paper is framed within Lorber's (1994) Social Construction of Gender Theory. This theory argues that gender is socially constructed (Lorber, 1994). To see gender as a social construct is for the individual to view gender as part of our routine everyday life where "gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life" (p.54). The focus of this analytical framework is to view gender role as a social phenomenon that is the result of human interaction in this social life. In view of this, the roles of certain (or most) fictional characters like Anowa and Christine in literary texts can be analyzed from the purview of social construction. That these characters are designed by their society to perform and/or do gender.

According to Lorber (1994), gender as a social construct goes through "a process" which "creates the social differences that define "woman" and "man" (p.60) In social interaction throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order" (p.60). Wharton (2009) adds that gender is a socialization process that involves "processes through which individuals take on gendered qualities and characteristics... and learn what their society expects of them as males or females" (p.31). In the traditional patriarchal society, males and females act and react in certain ways that portray their gender roles and differences. Gender differences, according to Millett has "essentially cultural, rather than biological" (1971, pp.28–9). For her, gender is "the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (Millett, 1971, p.31). What this means is that the society processes males to be males and females to be females. In effect, their gender roles will differ. Each of them will play the role assigned by this society consequent to the kind of training received.

Making references to Butler, Lorber (1994, p.60) observes that "the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once" (Butler 1990, p.145). In analyzing the literary texts, I could observe how the fictional characters are routinely conditioned and trained towards making good wives to their husbands in the future. Thus, gender roles are products of nurture and/or social learning. Haslanger (1995) views gender roles as "causally constructed social forces: either have a causal role in bringing gendered individuals into existence or (to some substantial sense) shape the way we are *qua* women and men. And the mechanism of construction is social learning" (p.98).

The assertions above on the social construct of gender are significant in this study though it is a strand of sociology. Primacy is placed on Anowa and Christine, the protagonists whose behaviour in the texts provides a logical view that they are gender conditioned by their society to behave in ways that position them as marriage-focused beings. Not only this but also, the texts cast light on the impact of this gendered role on the Akan and Ugandan societies portrayed through Anowa and Christine. It is significant therefore to consider the texts within

the context of the fictional Akan and Ugandan traditional societies as constituting a body of social and cultural norms and traditional conventions which determine the gender role of males and females, and regulate, supervise and enforce their fullest outplay.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussions**

In this section, we discuss the gender stereotyping of the two female characters in the selected texts within Lober's social construction analytical framework and the extant literature. We begin the discussion with an overview of the two selected texts.

##### **Overview of *Anowa* and *Tropical Fish***

Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970) could have been described as a sociological tract at best because of its handling of social and cultural issues but going beyond these spectra, its weight of contemporary issues about pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa makes the text gain a literary significance (Opoku-Agyemang, 1997, p.21). *Anowa* is an eponymous drama about a young girl Anowa who grapples with fulfilling a socially imposed role – the destiny of marriage. This social role imposed on her played out as her eventual fate in a land that values marriage as an ideal institution for the ideal individual. Aidoo problematizes Anowa's conflict of interest in the play when she (the protagonist) goes against the choice of her parents, Badua and Osam as well as the society to marrying Kofi Ako who is described as a "good-for-nothing cassava-man, and a watery male of all watery male" (Aidoo, 1970, p.15). Going against the traditional convention of marriage, Opoku-Agyemang (1997) claims that "the eponymous heroine, Anowa, chooses for herself and against custom the man she wants to marry. Her decision so completely shatters traditional familial bonds that she moves with her husband, Kofi Ako, from her family home in Yebi to Oguaa where settles with him" (p.21). From another viewpoint, "Anowa is presented as an intelligent and self-expressive individual who stands for change" (Appiah et al., 2021, p.58). The story may be said to reflect pre-independence Ghana whose destiny was always decided by colonial subjects until her eventual freedom from colonial rule.

Baingana's *Tropical Fish* (henceforth referred to as TF) is an eponymous novel published in 2005. It is one of her sparkling stories about fictional Uganda which portrays *inter alia*, the struggle of young women in Africa in their quest for improved standard of living. Baingana's work aptly describes the impact of Western exploitation as noted by Gagiano thus:

The story (and it is the title story of the collection) is a brilliant illustration of neo-colonialism; of continuing European/Western exploitation of African societies: the African "supplies" (material or sexual) cheaply obtained from the African sources and making handsome profits for the expatriate entrepreneurs (2013, n.p).

Baingana utilizes the family of three sisters namely, Christine, Patti and Rosa to bring her readers along with the themes of sexuality, love and reintegration from a cross-cultural perspective. The story attempts to cast light on the erstwhile Idi Amin regime which was characterized by extreme corruption and exploitation.

### **Gender Stereotyping as a social construct in the two texts:**

On the traditional role of the woman, Sam (2021) states thus,

Traditionally, the woman is seen as a caregiver and a housewife who is primarily concerned with domestic roles: cooking, washing and cleaning. The experiences of marriage and motherhood are made to dominate the life and identity of women in Africa and therefore, women are left behind to man the home and children. African women and for that matter female characters in male African writings are modelled along these lines (p.70).

Knowing this too well, it is not surprising to find that the society in which Anowa and Christine live considers both characters as ideal women who should pattern their lives towards marriage. Aidoo's heroine, Anowa, is seen in Yebi community to be 'well-baked' for marriage. She is described in the text thus:

Beautiful as Korado Ahima,  
Someone's -Thin-Thread.  
A dainty little pot  
Well-baked,  
And polished smooth  
To set in a nobleman's corner (p.7).

In the above extract, just as Aidoo presents her heroine, Anowa, as a marriage material whose roles are patterned in this regard, Anowa's society, also, significantly defines her value as a woman who should end up in marriage. Based on the above, it could be argued that there is a marriage between Aidoo's characterization technique and the social construct theory. According to the social construction theory, performing a gender role is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but a social construct (Lorber, 1994). The molding or pottering of Anowa like a pot to be a wife material which eventually played out agrees with the ideology of this theory. A 'dainty little pot' is metaphorically describing Anowa in the modelling process. As observed in the extract above, we argue that in the Yebi community, female characters like Anowa are pots meant for marriage. They are people's wives; 'Someone's -Thin-Thread' so to speak. They are therefore modelled to suit noblemen in the society. Anowa is socially cut for marriage, an enduring effort that is regulated, supervised and enforced by her mother, Badua and policed by both the old woman and the old man as well as the Yebi community. Anowa is still young and undeveloped, thus she needs to be worked on or, better yet, put through the 'polishing' social process in order to become the kind of wife that a nobleman would want to take her home. Her eventual marriage to Kofi Ako results from this societal process. In tandem with the social construct theory, Aidoo uses her characterization technique to present an archetypal character who is assigned the responsibility of educating and informing the traditional society of the consequences of stereotyping the female gender.



In Aidoo's drama, Anowa's nonchalant behaviour towards marriage brings about public unrest. As commonly observed, the old man and the old woman are the mouthpiece of the Yebi tradition. Through them, we get to know that the society is unhappy about Anowa's intransigence in the matters of marriage. The Yebi community deems this petulance on the part of Anowa as an unfortunate character. As this attitude gets the community sick, there arises the rhetoric of Aidoo's presentation of a character who, in the words of the 'mouth-that-eats-peeper-and salt' "is not a girl to meet every day". A child conditioned to acknowledge that it is the woman's traditional role to marry, the 'mouth-that-eats-peeper-and salt' who serve to gender police this role, think that Anowa's unpredicted attitude towards performing this role makes her an unfortunate child to avoid. This is stated as follows. They ask,

But what shall we say of our child,  
The unfortunate Anowa? Let us just say that  
Anowa is not a girl to meet every day (p.7)

They find this attitude unacceptable and blame it on Badua who they believe, has spoiled her. Next, we find that the society is not only unhappy but also worried about her refusal to get married to any of the sturdy suitors who have approached her for marriage. This is shown in the following:

That Anowa is something else! Like all the beautiful maidens in the tales, she has refused to marry any of the sturdy men who have asked for her hand in marriage. No one knows what is wrong with her! (p.7)

They suggest to Badua to put it to her that her "I won't, I won't" (p.8) would not take her anywhere. The society also reminds her that she would not remain younger forever if she refuses to accept to follow that straight path upon which she has been set. The old woman bids Badua to tell Anowa that "the sapling breaks with bending that will not grow straight" (p.8). In the worldview of the fictional Akan society, Anowa must fulfil the task of marriage as a female or woman if she has initially failed to serve as a priestess. It is perhaps, the duty of her mother to get her ready for this task.

Another phase of the traditional Yebi society is Badua and her husband, Osam. These folks share the worldview that the female is ultimately a marriage construct, and their daughter is no exception. Badua says

I want my child  
To be a human woman  
Marry a man,  
Tend a farm  
And be happy to see her  
Peppers and her onions grow.  
A woman like her  
Should bear children, (p.12)

In the above, the marriage of Anowa is portrayed as the ultimate goal of both Badua and the Yebi community. In line with the social construct theory, both Badua and the Yebi community have constructed this gendered identity for any upcoming female after puberty (Haslanger, 1995). Notwithstanding that, it can also be observed that Aidoo attempts to portray marriage as the only recognized institution in Yebi community for procreation although other African communities may differ in their belief that procreation is only possible through marriage. Badua expects nothing less than Anowa getting married to be able to procreate. She is also gladly anticipating grandchildren in the marriage metaphorically represented as ‘peppers and onions’.

Further, Abena Badua remains restless because Anowa is still unmarried some six years after her puberty. Badua leads us into her mind when she states that Anowa’s uncompromising behaviour towards marriage has preoccupied her mind, and thus, giving her cause for concern. Badua says that

Any mother would be concerned if her daughter refused to get married six years after her puberty. If I do not worry about this, what shall I worry about?  
Besides, a woman is not a stone but a human being; she grows (p.10)

Representing a society that has deep cultural inclination for marriage, Badua is determined to see her only daughter get married to continue the traditional role of women – childbearing. Again, in the text, Aidoo informs us that Anowa’s society will talk should Badua fail to get Anowa put up with a man. She narrates this as follows:

So it is nothing at a...a...l...l  
to you that your child is  
not married and goes round wild, making everyone talk about her? (p.11)

This extract also implies that Anowa’s society does not only socially condition her for marriage but also polices her until she fulfils that traditional mandate. Though brought up initially to serve as a priestess, Badua is against seeing her daughter as a ‘spirit woman’. Badua will not favour her only daughter for such a tradition. She would rather get her to marry as a ‘human woman’.

Finally, this social gender policing pays off. Anowa comes home with the news of finding a suitor. She says,

Mother, Father, I have met a man  
I want to marry...  
I say I have found a man I would like to marry...  
Kofi Ako asked me to marry him  
And I said I will too (14)

This news should be heartwarming to her parents but on the contrary, the man of her choice is not her parents' choice. Anowa, has consistently turned down their choice of husband. This time, when she comes up with her choice of man, Badua stands in opposition. On the other hand, a very logical character analysis of Christine, the protagonist in TF, aids the reader to appreciate the traditional role of women under Idi Amin's dictatorship. As Ahlberg (2009) observes, "the dire social and economic[al] circumstances that prevent many young women from fulfilling their dreams, the exploitation of young African women by Europeans, the many betrayals suffered by women ..." (p.409) reflect in the thematic concerns of TF. Doreen uses the literary lens of character roles to depict a fictional Africa bedeviled with sociopolitical and socioeconomic challenges. As Helen Fallon acknowledges,

Talking about her decision to portray a wealthy Ugandan family, she spoke of how the portrayal of Africa in the media is invariably negative: "Wars, disease, corrupt government. And yes, that is Africa, but it's not the whole story...And I have never seen my upbringing and the upbringing of many people like me written down" (Fallon 2006, p.18).

In TF, it is the dream of the female character, Christine to have kids and a family before retirement. Christine believes that it will amount to a total disgrace should she end her life in a retirement home without children or family of her own. She narrates thus,

Imagine ending life in a retirement home, where you have to *pay* someone to look after you, as if you have *no children, no family?* What a disgrace! We are going back home in two years; home is home. Five years maybe. No, for us, our *kids* have to get into college first, you know the schools at home. When I finish my house; when I've set up my business; when I get the UN job I've been promised. That's the only way to survive, you know, to get paid in dollars... (p.114)

The extract indicates that the fictional Ugandan society, like the Akan society, has programmed her female characters to be marriage-focused. This is a social construct which supports the social construction of gender roles ideology as put forward by Millett (1971) and Lorber (1994). In the traditional setting, childbearing is the role of women in marriage. Sam (2021) agrees to this when she states that, "childbearing is crucial to female existence" (p.72). It is our strongest contention that Christine is conscious of this notion, so we argue that her intention to have children before retirement is reasonably speculative of her intention to marry before retirement. Further, we argue that it is not a mere intention on the part of Christine to dream the childbearing dream but that it is a social order, or more precisely, a social construct for every successful female to live in a marital home.

Baingana narrates further that most of the African men in Los Angeles are successful with degrees but this success is incomplete without wives. One of these wives to complete the success story, perhaps, will be Christine. She is able to figure out how ambitious these African men are, and advises that "she had better be a good, no, above-average woman" (p.115); in order to win the heart of anyone of them. Further, Baingana narrates how the fictional Ugandan

society creates the identity of the female character, Christine to see marriage as the only option for the rest of her meaningful life. Christine Mugisha, the protagonist, is a young upcoming adolescent in Uganda under Idi Amin's terror-filled reign. She schools in Uganda at the Makerere University. She is a Sociology student who is intelligent and well discerned. This notwithstanding, her traditional society has programmed her to envisage marriage as the real-life after school life. A duty call she must opt for eventually even when the educational dream is fulfilled. Baingana states thus,

Well, campus too was a kind of holiday before real life ahead of me: work, if I could get it, at a government job that didn't pay, in a dusty old colonial-style office; wearing shoes in desperate need of repair; eating roasted maize for lunch; getting debts and kids; becoming my parents. One option was marriage to someone from the right family, the right tribe, right pocketbook and potbelly, and have him pay the bills (p.97).

The marriage-focus is further interpolated in TF as a social construct. Speaking about their household responsibilities as married wives, the protagonist, Christine sheds light on the social tag on the women or female characters to work hard, and be graceful in serving their husbands and their society.

So, in Higher, as it's called, we have this extra duty in school and as *privileged young women* in Uganda, a third world country, don't you forget, because we are getting this excellent, government-subsidized (white) education. We must represent all the impoverished throngs who are not as lucky as we are, especially the women. *We must be graceful, hardworking, and upright*; disciplined enough to withstand the hordes of lusty men at university, in offices, or on the street who will try to 'spoil' us – unless, of course, they want to *marry us*. Then, as educated, faithful wives, we will work alongside our Christian *husbands in our modern civilized homes* (bedsheets folded to make perfect hospital corners), while serving our country in a lauded profession (p.111, all italicized cases are for clarity).

From the extract, the traditional society has constructed the female gender as an appendage to the man and his society. Therefore, women, irrespective of their level of education, learn to end up as wives in marital homes. It, therefore, means that consciously, every young female in this society learns and internalizes this social notion that she will end up being a wife. She is then socially processed by learning to be hardworking, graceful and upright. Wharton (2009) agrees that this socialization process involves “the individuals take[ing] on gendered qualities and characteristics... and learn[ing] what their society expects of them as males or females” (p.31). In the light of this, we contend that Christine and the other women she talks about are taking on a gendered characteristic and learning what the society expects of them.

### **The impact of this social construct**

Two social pressures were mounted on Anowa namely: the pressure to marry and the pressure to give birth. Unknown to Anowa and her society, her husband is impotent. It could be argued therefore, that the incessant social pressure from Anowa's traditional society impacted her life and development. It was the society that chose the path of marriage for her, unfortunately the same society became unable to offer solutions to her inability to conceive. Rather, Anowa fights this alone by suggesting countless times to her husband for a second wife. She tells Kofi Ako that "I shall get you a wife" (p.54). This thought of a second wife is suggestively the solution to the childlessness in her home but Ako will not budge to this. It is understandable to find Kofi Ako registering a wild enduring disinterest in this idea because it is his fault that Anowa is unable to conceive. Through Anowa, we understand that Kofi Ako does not allow her into his bed. On the contrary, the society sees the effective and efficient bed activity as the only way procreation is possible. If Anowa agreed to serve as a priestess, this impediment might not have come up but the societal pressure to marry brought her to a tragic end.

On the other hand, Christine's society, in TF, compelled her to fixate sexually, a condition borne out of her lifelong training as a female. For instance, she tells us that "sex was like school, something I just did. I mean, of course I wanted to" (p.89). In furtherance, she relates that "sex heals some wounds, apparently" (p.121). These instances set to normalize her craze and fantasies on sex. But as seen from the discussions before, she is socially conditioned to behave this way. It could therefore be concluded that, the social construct impacted her negatively because she did this at the expense of her education. She notes that through this sexual drive, "Peter became my habit. On Friday evenings I escaped from the usual round of campus parties to go to my old white man; my snug, private life" (p.94).

## 5. Conclusion

Gender stereotyping in African Female writings is rife. Though African male authors and critics claim that there should be a paradigm shift in this regard, most of the African female writers still see the need to register authorial voices against the relegation and the marginal representation of the female character in male-authored texts. This essay primarily interrogated Aidoo's *Anowa* and Baingana's *Tropical Fish* by examining how the two authors presented their heroines, Anowa and Christine. Methodologically, the essay adopted a qualitative content analysis approach (Elos & Kyngas, 2008), and using Lorber's (1994) social construction of Gender Theory, it confirms studies by Vogtsberger (2010), Appiah et al. (2021), Azuike (2019), Azuike (2015) and Mtenje (2016) who interrogated the issues of gender stereotyping in the texts. The paper reveals that Anowa and Christine are two archetypal characters socially framed, molded, created, constructed and processed and conditioned to do gender. They are set up to marry and procreate. Doing gender implies that the two characters adhered to the traditional convention of ultimately ending up as products of marriage and childbearing. This is revealed through the approach of character construct by both authors.

We have further shown that both authors registered an authorial voice against the traditional society in the way they portray the female gender. The paper argues that not only are the two characters conditioned and policed to do and/or perform gender but are also impacted negatively. We showed that Anowa became childless even though there was the social pressure to marry and procreate. Christine on the other hand, became sexually fixated at the

expense of her studies. The paper significantly contributes to the studies on gender roles of female characters in literary texts.

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