Contemporary Portrayals of Women by Women: Comparing India and Ghana

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A comparative analysis of the representation of the exiled female body in the Ghanaian Amma Darko’s Faceless, and the Indian Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things reveals similar brutal means of control over women’s sexual freedom, without erasing sociological differences like the influence of superstitions and curses in Ghana, and the internal policing of caste hierarchies in India. A study of linguistic hybridity in Manju Kapur of India’s Difficult Daughters and Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana’s Changes: a love story, shows the complexities of expressing local specificities in the ex-coloniser’s language for reasons of worldwide accessibility. A close look at cultural hybridity, or the juxtaposing of allusions to Western culture with non-Western cultural practices, highlights harmonious religious overlappings as well as religious conflicts resulting from the multiple religious practices in Ghana and in India. Instances of cultural hybridity also demonstrate the particular cultural richness, although not identical in Aidoo’s and in Kapur’s novels, engendered by the simultaneous deployment of Western and non-Western cultural references. This comparative study, therefore, underlines cultural and contextual specificities, in an attempt to avoid unjustified homogenisations or isolated nationalist essentialisations of these four coloured postcolonial women’s texts.

The texts I have selected for study here are by women authors from Ghana and from India. The choice of India perhaps does not need justification since I am of Indian origin, and the writings of postcolonial Indian authors are familiar to me. Ghana appears as a point of comparison to diversify and expand the debate in this paper because it is an English-speaking African nation, and can boast several published women authors. Since its accession to independence from British colonisation in 1957, despite repeated experiences of military dictatorship between 1966 and 1984, Ghana has achieved a certain democratic and economic autonomy that sets it apart from several other African countries mired in ethnic wars and military dictatorship. In other countries like Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Kenya there are also a few published women authors. Whereas Zimbabwe’s unresolved political problems are far more worrying than any literary distinction its female writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera have achieved, Nigeria’s male writers (for example Wole Soyinka or Chinua Achebe) overshadow the more faltering careers of women writers from Nigeria like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa. The same goes for Kenya’s Ngugi wa Thiongo as compared to women writers from Kenya like Grace Ogot and Margaret Ogola. This seems to indicate that feminism has achieved relatively more progress in Ghana than it has in other comparable English-speaking African countries. This is why I have opted to work on novels by Amma Darko.

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1 See http://crawfurd.dk/africa/ghana_timeline.htm.
and Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana in comparison with works by two women writers from India, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapoor.

Feminist theory has so far only made wishful excursions into postcolonial theory. Third World feminists have pointed out the need to take into account differences within the worldwide category of ‘Woman,’ which tends to be too heavily weighted on the side of the white, middle-class Western woman as model and norm. They have also stressed the necessity of studying coloured women’s engagement with coloured male discourse as adversaries and in conciliation with this same coloured male discourse, the necessity of addressing the specific forms of the double oppression of women in ex–colonized countries due to the combination of the exactions of colonial patriarchy with the dictates of indigenous patriarchies, and the particular exclusions of women from the political benefits of decolonisation. However, no convincing advance has apparently yet been made in the application of feminist emancipation theory to texts by Third World women.3

In a recent study, Elleke Boehmer underlines the utility of comparing literary texts by women from postcolonial countries, as a way towards greater awareness of the conditions of women in other countries of the world, making possible solutions to problems of women across frontiers, while also respecting the differences of the specific circumstances of each woman, and using these women’s texts, which foreground non-epic and non-allegorical narrative forms such as confession and juxtaposition of remembered fragments, in order to imagine new ways of including women in political processes.4 A comparative method consisting of the simultaneous study of two or more non-Western women authors from different geographical zones would circumvent other pitfalls that undermine postcolonial studies. For example, the comparison of a novel by an African author with a novel by an Indian author, would avoid the problem of a ‘reversed ethnocentricism’, which would reinstate a reductive binary between the periphery and the metropolitan centre, and would thus open the possibility of studying the specific literary innovations of the postcolonial authors in question, without measuring them against any Western literary norms.5 In addition, the fact of comparing literary texts by postcolonial authors who hail from different nations with different histories, different religions, different ethnic origins, or simply with different individual trajectories, would overcome the problem of any possible fundamentalist tendency which would result in a totalising discourse and a sterilising isolation. When we observe how the questions of nation, religion and ethnic difference are treated in two separate contexts, we should be able to avoid the danger of an inward-looking, essentialist reading. Finally, the comparison between two non-Western literary exoticisms could relativise the dilemma of the commercialisation of non-western literary texts solely for the needs and tastes of a Western readership.

Generally speaking, the tensions visible in postcolonial studies of non-White authors’ literary texts in English (without taking into account postcolonial literatures in languages other than English) can be explained in part by the emergence and evolution of postcolonial studies in English in Europe and the United States of America. In the 1960s, after an international colloquium on literatures of the Commonwealth in Leeds, all the literary creations of the decolonised countries of the former British Empire were

assembled under the heading ‘Literatures of the Commonwealth’, and subjected to narrow regionalist analyses, without any real theoretical base. Then in the 1980s, following upon theories propagated by Edward Said;6 by Homi Bhabha;7 and by Gayatri Spivak,8 people began asking questions about cultural differences, and about the possibility of comparing the experiences of the victims of colonialism, across geographical zones. However, no attention was given to the internal dynamics of these individual non-Western cultures taken separately, and still no studies were undertaken of the literary productions of these non-Western countries, in their own rights as literary texts.9

At a later stage, in the course of the 1990s, the advocates of postcolonial studies created a place for themselves in academia, in the USA and in Europe, and even across the decolonized countries. After an initial period of an essentialising search for authentic, pre-colonial national cultures (in fact, impossible to trace precisely anywhere), there came a more inclusive step which included studies of the overlapping experiences of colonisers and colonised, with a greater awareness of the cultural diversities of each formerly colonised country. This attention to the cultural specificities of each country under study, enabled the incorporation of a comparative method, with the aim of keeping track of their different ways of perceiving the world. If postcolonial studies revealed points of intersection with postmodernism (in particular because of Bhabha and Spivak who took inspiration from the writings of Jacques Derrida), postcolonialism kept a strong political orientation because of its link with colonialism, which distinguished it from the more aesthetic objectives of postmodernism. Towards the end of the 1990s, dissident voices appeared in the postcolonial ranks10, in order to question the gap which separated postcolonial theory from actual textual analyses, and to interrogate their clear-cut conceptual and institutional rooting in the universities of the Western world, as well as to denounce their distance from the material conditions and their blurring of the cultural specificities of the non-Western countries.

Three stages can therefore be perceived in the development of postcolonial studies: first, a radical theorisation against the mainstream of well-established literary studies, then a slow acceptance of postcolonial studies within university institutions of the Western world, with the imposition of new postcolonial theoretical orthodoxies, and finally, a questioning of these theoretical bases, found to be too restrictive and inapplicable in classroom literary teaching.11 Ultimately what seems to be at stake in studies of the literary creations of the non-Western world as they have evolved since the late 1970s, marked by the publication of Edward Said’s seminal Orientalism, is a search to diversify a rigid binary opposition between the West and the rest, an effort to right the disequilibriums of global capitalism that prolong and extend the imbalances between the

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10 Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather; Leela Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory.
colonisers’ world and the world of the colonised, with a need to take into account the specificities of particular disadvantaged groups (coloured people, women, minorities, migrants, low-wage workers, etc.), and an attempt to adapt the top-down theories in the domain to the evolving ground realities of the non-Western world and its textual productions.

In order to apply the comparative principles mentioned above to particular texts, I will proceed in two stages. First, I will compare the representation of the exiled female body in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy of India, and in *Faceless* by Amma Darko of Ghana. Then, I will place side by side the linguistic and socio-cultural hybridity in *Changes: a love story* by Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana and in *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur from India. My aim will be to demonstrate that a comparative study of non-Western novels can perhaps lead to a better understanding of what they are trying to express.

To begin with the exiled female body, we can note that Ketu Katrak, in a recent study on the politics of the female body in the postcolonial world, observes a double inferiorisation of the woman’s body, on the one hand by the restrictions of the colonial system, and on the other by the indigenous patriarchy. Katrak sees in postcolonial female bodies a simultaneous oppression, for example in masculine control of female sexuality, and resistance, which often takes the form of a self-imposed exile. This in turns enables a personalised political stand aimed at achieving greater social justice.

Among the elements that are similar in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Amma Darko, we can point out an ostracisation of women without male partners, both in the Ghanaian and in the Indian contexts. In Darko’s *Faceless*, her character Maa Tsuru, mother of the child protagonist, Fofo, does not protest against physical ill-treatment by her second lover, Ni Kpakpo, after the departure of her first lover, Kwei, precisely in order to avoid finding herself in the unenviable situation of a woman without a man in her life. In Arundhati Roy’s text, the great-aunt Baby Kochamma, a spinster who had been in love with an Irish Jesuit without ever being able to consummate her love, is resentful towards her niece, the rebel-mother of the protagonist twins, for daring to question her fate as a divorcee-mother, by keeping her love options open. Such freedom in love matters appears scandalous to the great-aunt, who adheres to the conservative dictates of traditional Indian society about what is right and what is not, concerning physical love.

In spite of a class difference between the characters of the two novels, Maa Tsuru in Darko’s text and Ammu in Roy’s narrative, both give priority to their own physical desire over social taboos, and both bear the heavy social consequences this entails. With Maa Tsuru, it is a question of finding fulfilment in physical exchanges with a man, in spite of the inconveniences of successive pregnancies, in conditions of continuing

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17 Darko, *Faceless*, p.188.
economic penury. With Roy’s Ammu, the problem arises more from caste prohibitions, which she chooses deliberately to disregard, at her risk and peril, by daring to realise her intimate dream of physical felicity with a person labelled as disadvantaged and inferior. In both cases, however, the woman finds herself isolated and compromised following upon her boldness in love.

Both characters are deprived of their most basic human rights. Ammu is made to sacrifice her very right to exist and to express herself as a person (being deprived of her locus standi), snatched away by those around her, on the pretext of upholding the family’s honour. As for Maa Tsuru, she is unable to defend herself, through the awareness of her own guilt, in the face of her daughter Fofo’s accusations of having given birth to six children, without the slightest thought about their future.

The bodies of aged women also appear in Darko’s and in Roy’s texts. The maternal grandmother of the twins in the God of Small Things, is described with ‘fine, pale skin… creased like cream on cooling milk and dusted with tiny red moles’, while her thinning, silver hair conceals ‘scars of old beatings from an old marriage’. This ‘Blind Mother Widow with a violin’, despite her very upper-class social standing, has not escaped domestic violence. The mother of Comrade Pillai of the Communist Party, exhibits her advanced age through the wrinkles she bears on every inch of her body, and seems to spend her days ‘star[ing] vacantly at the wall opposite her… grunting regular, rhythmic little grunts, like a bored passenger on a long bus journey’. The emblematic figure of the grandmother of one and all, named Naa Yomo, in Faceless, aged eighty-seven, presides over all the comings and goings in her slum area, and is an inexhaustible source of local information. If Darko is less expansive than Roy about the physical appearance of this female ancestor, she does not appear insensitive to her role as preserver and transmitter of the traditions of her community.

A feeling of rejection against the state of abjection in which their respective mothers find themselves is visible in the young Rahel in The God of Small Things, and in the adolescent Fofo, in Faceless. It is after the banishment of Ammu from the family home in Ayemenem, on an occasion when she comes back to see her daughter, that Ammu belches, coughs up phlegm and breathes noisily, having allowed her eyebrow hairs to grow inaesthetically ‘like palps’. That is when Rahel is seized by a deep hatred for this mother who has publicly fallen from grace. Similarly, Fofo, who is struggling with her hard life as a street delinquent at the age of fourteen, is haunted at night by the disturbing ghosts of her own inability to accept the indifference with which her mother, Maa Tsuru, has abandoned her four elder children to the violence of street life.

Finally, the narrative structures of Roy’s and Darko’s novels also have points of resemblance. Roy’s text opens with the death by drowning of a young girl aged nine, and the entire novel is an investigation of the circumstances leading to this death. With Darko, the lifeless and mutilated body of Fofo’s elder sister, appears near the beginning and triggers various enquiries: by Fofo, by an NGO that defends women, by the police, and by a local radio station. In both novels, it is a dead female body that serves as the starting point of the narrative.

20 Darko, Faceless, p.188.
24 Darko, Faceless, p.188.
27 Darko, Faceless, pp.43, 115, 121-122.
29 Darko, Faceless, p.45.
If there are several thematic overlappings about women’s bodies in Darko’s and Roy’s texts, there are also divergences, due to sociological differences between Ghana and India. For example, the problems which Ammu has to confront in order to fulfil her desire for Velutha, who belongs to a lower caste than herself, stem from the barriers between various social groups, each of which has its own means of internal policing. In comparison, the problems of Maa Tsuru in her slum are first about surviving, about obtaining enough food for each day, then about overcoming the superstitions and rumours of curses and bad omens, which circulate about her own birth from a mother who had been abandoned by her lover, and who had died while giving birth to her.

According to their respective places on the social ladder of their community, the characters have nightmares of a feared loss of social status, or dreams of a desired rise in society. Thus, after having been turned out by her family, when she is in her ‘grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey’ Ammu has nightmares of being approached by policemen ‘with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair’, a social branding reserved for prostitutes. Her fear is thus of being visibly humiliated in society. By contrast, Fofo has beautiful dreams in her urban squat, of living in a house with a real roof, and with a real toilet, where nobody would brutally interrupt her while she was relieving herself.

Thus, a comparison of similarities and differences between two postcolonial novels, around the theme of the woman’s body, for example, far from reducing the texts under analysis to a few random common points by bringing them together artificially, makes possible, on the contrary, a greater awareness of the specificities of the conditions of women in each of the zones studied. In both Roy’s and Darko’s novels, similarities like the ostracisation of women without official male partners, and social disgrace as a penalty for boldness in love, appear as the means by which control is exercised over the sexual freedom of women. This does not erase differences between the novelistic representations of the societies of India and Ghana, as visible in the internal policing of caste hierarchies in Roy’s novel and in the strong influence of superstitions, omens and curses in Darko’s text. Such a comparison also avoids a reading that is either solely in relation to the former colonising metropolis, or that is too nationalistic and thus exaggeratedly cut off from the rest of the world, by the very fact of juxtaposing the conditions of women in two different, non-Western contexts. The variations in the social constraints and material difficulties faced by the women in Ghana and in India in these two novels establish bridges and parallels that highlight the specificities of each text.

If postcolonial women undergo bodily, psychological and social problems that are related to their indigenously traditional circumstances while also bearing the marks of former colonisation, then postcolonial societies are also confronted with the complexities of the superimposition of pre-colonial linguistic and social practices, colonial influences and the requirements of the contemporary world. Homi Bhabha has conceptualised linguistic and socio-cultural hybridity in postcolonial terms, as the site of the enunciation of cultural differences in the grey zone of interaction between oppressor and oppressed, between coloniser and colonised, which makes possible resistance and survival. Thus in the very act of imitating the voice of his coloniser-master, the

30 Roy, The God of Small Things, ‘the constant, high whining mewl of local disapproval’, p.42; ‘the smug, ordered world that she so raged against’, p.167
31 Darko, Faceless, pp.155-156.
33 Darko, Faceless, pp.26-27.
34 Boehmer, Stories of Women, p.188.
35 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, pp.17-18.
colonised produces the irony of an incomplete imitation, of the same but not quite, thus doubling the perception of the Other, simultaneously in an authorised version of the Other (according to the wishes of the Master) and in an inappropriate vision of the Other (which falls outside the wishes of the Master)\textsuperscript{36}. It is the expression of this subversive multiplicity that interrupts the unilateral and linear univocity of Western forms of knowledge.

In a similar vein, Robert Young has studied the hybrid links between Victorian racial theories and contemporary postcolonial articulations of cultural difference, seeing in both trends an obsession with transgressive, inter-racial sex and ‘antagonistic forms of inner dissonance’.\textsuperscript{37} However, there has been criticism against this all-encompassing, elastic concept of postcolonial hybridity. Indeed, hybridity is not the exclusive monopoly of colonised peoples, and can be observed within a single people, or between different colonising peoples. Besides, Anjali Prabhu, in a recent study on the limits of the critical pertinence of hybridity, underlines the racial origin of the term ‘hybridity’ (similar to the term ‘interbreeding’ or ‘crossbreeding’), which carries its own hierarchisations, giving priority always to the white races, and disadvantaging the black races.\textsuperscript{38} Linked to the racial divisions of colonialism, ‘hybridity’ in fact refers to coloured labour before decolonisation, and to the labouring class under contemporary global capitalism.

In opposition, Prabhu (following Frantz Fanon in \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}) claims a universal status for the black narrator, on the same level as the acknowledged universality of the white narrator (directly comprehensible to one and all), and recommends pragmatic readings of concrete texts which treat of specific postcolonial situations, in the hope that through their strong contextualisation, their conscious affirmation of an equal status for black and white voices, and their application to specific, postcolonial socio-political spaces of the textual theories of hybridity, these new racially non-hierarchised understandings of postcoloniality will make it possible to overcome the inherent binarism that undermines it. Prabhu points towards an attempt to acknowledge and express racial difference without subscribing to the colonial hierarchies still associated with it.

In order to explore the in-between areas of interaction and cultural transpositions between the former colonisers and the formerly colonised, I will now proceed with a comparison of the linguistic and socio-cultural hybridity in \textit{Changes: a love story} by Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana\textsuperscript{39}, and \textit{Difficult Daughters} by Manju Kapur from India\textsuperscript{40}. Ama Ata Aidoo transposes expressions from the languages of Ghana, into her writing in English, endowing it with a special turn. For example, in order to report on the disturbances after the military takeover in the 1970s in Ghana, her character named Fusena says that ‘all over the country, the programmes that had been initiated by the old regime were being wound up or sold off to private individuals. And very cheaply, as though they were perishable goods at the end of a market day’.\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{36} Homi Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, pp.85-92.
\bibitem{41} Aidoo, \textit{Changes}, p.65.
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Kwamu mountains towards Nkawkaw. The female protagonist Esi Sekyi, in a moment of acute solitude, perceives the long weekend for New Year as ‘stretching ahead like the Yendi-Tamale Road when it was first constructed: straight, flat and endless’.

Another technique used by Aidoo is to intersperse words from Ghanaian languages directly and without transition in her English text. Thus ‘wahala’ refers to a conjugal quarrel between Opokuuya and Kubi over who will take their only car on a particular day. ‘Flabberwhelmed’ is a typically Ghanaian fusion of the English words ‘flabbergasted’ and ‘overwhelmed’. And ‘comot’ followed by ‘kabisa’ indicate that the marriage between Ali Kondey and Esi Sekyi was definitively broken.

With Manju Kapur, in Difficult Daughters, there are Punjabi words (very similar to the terms used in Hindi, the national language of India) for various relatives in a family including its collateral branches, all living under the same roof, in the Indian fashion. Thus the immediate parents are ‘Mati’ or ‘Maji’ and ‘Pitaji’ or ‘Baoji’. The respected grandfather is ‘Bade Baoji’, the uncle and aunt are ‘Tauji’ and ‘Tajji’. The grand-aunt is ‘Bua’ and the brother-in-law and sister-in-law are ‘Praji’ and ‘Pabiji’. Hindi words for different daily rituals or on the occasion of a marriage appear as ‘Havan’ and ‘Sandhya’, or ‘Kanya-Daan’ (formal giving-away of a daughter), and the seven ‘pheras’ or circumambulations around the sacred fire. There are also words of abuse uttered by Virmati’s mother against Virmati, the first time she returns to her father’s home after her clandestine marriage: ‘randi’ which means ‘harlot’ or ‘fallen woman’; and ‘badmash’ which would be the equivalent of ‘hooligan’ or ‘good-for-nothing’. Among the transpositions from expressions in Hindi into English in Kapur’s text is the term ‘eating my head’. The term ‘for who-all, who-all’ also appears in order to warn the new daughter-in-law to be ready to serve unscheduled meals to various persons without advance intimation. The repetition twice over of the same word in the instructions to the tonga-driver introduces the syntax of Hindi into the sentence in English (‘Here, here, this way’... ‘now stop, stop’...). One of Virmati’s sisters in order to describe the changes in Amritsar during the Partition, states: ‘Everybody’s house functioned as an ashram, with beddings laid on the floor while the angans [inner courtyards] were converted into langars [collective kitchens].’ With both Aidoo and Kapur then, the inclusion of terms or expressions typical of their respective countries gives a deliberate hybrid colour to their texts, by wilfully twisting the classical English language of the coloniser. This illustrates the quandaries of the postcolonial condition of writers both in Ghana and in India, obliged to use the former colonisers’ language in order to be comprehensible beyond a limited, local circle, while trying to express very local specificities. Aidoo and Kapur respectively refashion the English language according to their own needs and inspiration, endowing it with new rhythms and unprecedented expressive possibilities.

The religious practices represented in the two texts also show multiple influences instead of adhering to any single, monolithic orthodoxy. In Ama Ata Aidoo’s love story, the Muslim character Ali Kondey, who had loyally carried out his Friday devotions at

42 Aidoo, Changes, p.106.
43 Aidoo, Changes, p.144.
44 Aidoo, Changes, p.9.
45 Aidoo, Changes, p.149.
46 Aidoo, Changes, p.159.
47 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.62.
49 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.221.
50 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.221.
51 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.204.
52 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.205.
53 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.270.
the mosque, perceives his chance meeting with the ravishing, young Esi Sekyi, of the Christian religion, as ‘a gift from Allah’ 54. Further, we learn that Ali and his first Muslim wife, in order to indulge their two young children, used to observe New Year’s Day as a festival day, but in the manner of their Muslim Eid, by preparing festive food for an open house day which followed its own momentum 55. When Esi returns to her native village in the south of Ghana, her mother and her grandmother attend the Methodist Christian Church, and also visit the traditional priestess, who is known for calling up the souls of dead persons of the village56. With Kapur, whose novel unfolds between 1904 and 1947, a period of anti-colonial and inter-communal conflicts in India, religious labels are inevitably politicised. Thus, a cousin of the protagonist Virmati explains to her that in all the public university colleges, there are many seats reserved for Muslim students, but that these reserved quotas are ‘hardly ever filled, because those people don’t like to study…’ 57. Later, Virmati’s university hostel neighbour tells her of a betrayal of trust by a close Muslim lady-friend at the elections in her university the preceding year. As soon as the Muslim lady-friend knew that Virmati’s hostel neighbour was a candidate under the student banner of the Congress Party, instead of supporting her during her campaign, she stood as a candidate for the rival side, led on by the Muslim League. The conclusion drawn by Virmati’s hostel neighbour was: ‘[s] many things are deeper than friendship. In this case it must have been religious identity, maybe Muslim fear and insecurity....’ 58. In a picturesque anecdote, Virmati’s clandestine lover relates to her a story about the celebration of the Hindu festival of Dassera in Ferozepur in October 1939. While effigies of the demonical trio from the Ramayana were being burnt—Ravana, Meghnath and Kumbhkarna—an effigy of Adolf Hitler had been added. 59 A final example of the multiple effects of questions of religion on the lives of the characters from Difficult Daughters, is visible in the choice of the first name for Virmati’s and Harish Chandra’s first child (in the intervening interval, Harish Chandra had become Virmati’s legitimate spouse). The girl child was born in December 1947, during the terrible events of the Partition of India and Pakistan. Her father refused to name her ‘Bharati’, for he found that the birth of independant India was too closely linked to violence due to religious differences. He therefore preferred the name ‘Ida’, which had the connotation of a clean page for him, a new beginning 60.

The novelistic expression of hybridity concerning religion, by Aidoo and by Kapur, can be interpreted as a way of conveying the complexities of postcolonial experiences, simultaneously exposing the peaceful overlapping of practices from different religions, as well as the politicisations and possible conflicts arising out of religious differences.

Instances of cultural hybridity in the novels of Aidoo and Kapur, through allusions to Western culture that appear side-by-side with mentions of non-Western cultural practices and references, show the multiple riches on which postcolonial writers can draw for the creation of their works. For example, Aidoo depicts the importance of dietetics and contraception in contemporary Ghana when she presents her woman character Opokuya Dakwa, a nurse and mid-wife by profession, as a militant for a balanced diet and easier access to means of contraception for the women of her country. Aidoo’s narrator notes with humour in passing that Opokuya had the feeling of

54 Aidoo, Changes, p.4.
55 Aidoo, Changes, p.118.
56 Aidoo, Changes, P.165.
57 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.119.
58 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.134.
59 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.94.
60 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.277.
being an impostor, for she was herself overweight and had had four children. The main woman character Esi Sekyi savours the mixed cuisine of diverse inspirations practised in the north of Ghana, when she visits Ali Kondey’s family. The blending of African pastoral and nomadic fare, with the refinements of French recipes, could give very successful results like ‘Pintade Fumée avec Vin Blanc Sec’. With Kapur, examples of cultural hybridity are numerous: the pretensions to a grandiose aesthetic by Virmati’s cousin in the interior decoration of his parents’ home, with a bust of Julius Caesar in Italian marble, and a fountain with double basins with a little statue on top; the Western classical music records owned by Professor Harish Chandra, a graduate from Oxford; the library of Amritsar’s Arya Sabha College, well stocked in works of the literature of classical antiquity and (rather outdated) criticism on works of English literature; the Gothic tower of Lahore’s Government College, a superb manifestation of Lahore’s colonial heritage; the juxtaposition of a sweet-smelling Indian creeper-plant (called ‘Raat-ki-Rani’ or Queen of the Night) with allusions to Lady Macbeth who had assassinated sleep; a reference to the exemplary concentration of the Archer brother, Arjuna, of the five Pandavas from the epic Mahabharata on his target during an archers’ competition, to convey the fact that Harish Chandra’s entire concentration was fixed only on his beloved Virmati; a pious four-line verse inscribed on Christian tombs in a princely state in the north of Punjab, about which verse Virmati did not understand much; or the overlapping of public events like the cancellation of a Hindu Mahasabha procession in December 1943 with private events like the deaths of Virmati’s father and grandfather, separated by an interval of only one day. These cultural references tend deliberately towards a multiplication of the possible interpretations of the text.

Contemporary approaches to women’s conditions in non-Western countries although still under the shadow of Western feminist theories, help us to understand the multiple subjections and brutalisations faced by women in non-Western societies. Various attempts to theorise hybridity demonstrate the paradoxical circulations of power between white people and black people, continued in today’s globalised use of English, and the contemporary diversification of cultural references. Methodologically speaking, the aim of a comparative approach in the postcolonial field can be understood as a way to incorporate difference (of gender, race, class, caste, religion, culture, history, nation) in reading techniques, by paying attention to the specific textual characteristics of particular literary works studied, and thus to avoid a generalised application of sweeping, baggy concepts like ambivalence, subalternity, nationalism, modernity, anti-colonialism etc. The taking into account of the particular context of each text can go a long way towards precluding the dangers of blurring the specificities of spatially situated histories, under an unfounded homogenisation of different lived experiences in the various parts of the world. Comparing two or more such texts can at the same time

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61 Aido, Changes, p.15.
62 Aido, Changes, p.136.
63 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.33.
64 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.39.
65 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.52.
67 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.162.
68 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.186.
69 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.190.
70 Kapur, Difficult Daughters, p.236.
help overcome the problem of perceiving individual texts in essentialising isolation (with the inevitable pitfalls of extremist nationalism, religious fundamentalism and racist or caste superiority incorporated as natural and not needing any justification), or of reading them solely in binary opposition to Western expectations, Western literary techniques, and Western narrative forms. Finally, the specific study of the exiled female body in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Darko’s *Faceless* tries to follow the struggles for survival and the means of resistance against tyranny, on the part of the adolescent, the adult and the aged female characters. The analysis of linguistic and socio-cultural hybridity in Aidoo’s *Changes: a Love Story*, and in Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* attempts to show the complexities of conveying local specificities in the globalised English language, the multiple religious practices in Ghana and in India which provoke harmonious religious overlappings as well as conflicts, and the simultaneous deployment of Western and non-Western cultural allusions, endowing each of these texts with a particular cultural richness.