

# THE TORN VEIL

WOMEN'S SHORT STORIES  
FROM THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA



COMPILED BY  
ANNEMARIÉ VAN NIEKERK

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AND OTHER WOMEN'S  
SHORT STORIES FROM THE  
CONTINENT OF AFRICA

*compiled and introduced by*

*ANNEMARIÉ VAN NIEKERK*



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FOR KATE

“Maybe for you it can be different. But you have to make it different.”

(From: Marjorie J. Mbilinyi’s “A woman’s life”)

# INTRODUCTION

## I

THE TITLE OF THIS ANTHOLOGY, *The Torn Veil*, is taken from a story by the Ghanaian writer, Mabel Dove Danquah, which is included here. This provides an appropriate metaphor for the voices of African women which have been muted or veiled for a very long time, but which now insist on being heard. It also reminds one of the words of Jane Bryce (1992:203) who says that "of the many forms of women's indirect resistance to oppression, writing is emerging as one of the most powerful and enduring". "The *Torn Veil*" therefore implies women's forceful insistence on breaking down the repression which has kept them unheard.

This collection of stories hopefully helps to tear the veil and allow them to tell their stories – stories from all over the continent – from Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia in the North to Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and South Africa in the South; from Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria in the West to Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania in the East. As such, this collection could be seen as part of the current process of establishing and expanding a distinct, however diverse, African women's literature.

The growth of this neglected corpus of literature goes hand in hand with a worldwide trend to draw women into history by listening to their experiences and stories, because as Gerda Lerner (1979:158) says, "men have defined their experience as history and have left women out". The most recent movement in feminist literary historiography is a move away from the earlier "compensatory history", which focused on so-called "women-worthies" who have been left out of history, or "contribution history", which tried to fit women's experiences into the empty spaces of traditional historical categories. The recent phase is a move away from a male-orientated to a female-orientated historical consciousness in which the woman becomes, as Joan Wallach Scott (1987:36) puts it, "a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative". This is an important task, because African women writers have not yet reached the same heights as their male counterparts. What Lloyd W. Brown (1981:3) said seventeen years ago – after a thorough, scholarly investigation of women writers in African literature – is still relevant today: "African literature has to be understood as

literature by African men, for interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers." In view of this the women writers of Africa are seen as "the other voices" – "the unheard voices". Clarifying this, Brown (1981:3) explains that they are "rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictable male-oriented studies in the field". He notes further that relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have devoted significant space to African women writers and concludes that "ignoring ... women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless – and a rather unfortunate one at that".

African women writers are acutely aware of this. In an interview with the Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo, the critic Adeola James (1990:11-12) put the following question to her: "Why do we have no woman writer to compare with an Achebe, Soyinka or Ngugi, or critic to compare with an Irele?". In response to this question Aidoo answered: "The question of the woman writer's voice being muted has to do with the position of women in society generally. Women writers are just receiving the writer's version of the general neglect and disregard that women in the larger society receive ... Bessie Head died of neglect. So how is she going to be an Achebe?".

The Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta (in James 1990:45), explains that many African societies are not yet ready to accept women as writers, and quotes an incident from her own life: "The first book I wrote, my husband burnt, and then I found I couldn't write with him around".

Not only is African women's writing often discouraged and their literary contributions relegated to the background, but the majority also had a late start in literacy education. Women have been second in line when it came to the acquisition of literacy and a level of proficiency in the colonial languages, which inevitably makes for easier access to publishing opportunities. Even today educated women in Africa form a tiny minority. Phyllis Pollard (1992:182), in a study of East African women's literature, mentions that European colonisation and traditional African attitudes combined to exclude women from those educational processes that prepare one for the craft of writing. She adds that the practical routine of the majority of African women's lives as childbearers and rearers, agricultural workers and water carriers impedes literary creativity. The Kenyan writer, Pamela Kola (in James 1990:49), expresses her thoughts concerning the logical consequences of the gender-biased educational situation in Kenya as follows: "Education was given to men first. If you don't have the basic education, you are not exposed to other people in different spheres of life, how can you write?".

However, African women are by no means unfamiliar with the art of nar-

ration. African women's cultural production is far older than colonialism. For many centuries they have been the traditional storytellers and performers. This role gave them significance as educators, historians and transmitters of traditional rituals accompanying birth, initiation, marriage and death ceremonies. Brown (1981:14), in his study of African women writers, emphasises that this role has provided the opportunity for the voice of the woman to be heard in her singing or reciting tales from her own perspective as wife, mother and housekeeper.

Unfortunately many oral stories, myths and legends were lost during colonisation, with its emphasis on the written word, and its initial Western dismissal of the cultural and literary importance of orature. It was often relegated to the category of folklore, and because of a negligence to transcribe this rich narrative tradition, much of it was lost. During the past few decades this situation has improved slightly with a growing interest in the documentation of oral literature. This anthology includes some transcribed or retold stories in order to represent African oral literature and to exemplify the African literary tradition that was there long before a written African literature came into existence.

Interestingly, much of African women's written stories bear traces of the old orature. These traces are evident in the dramatic dialogue, direct address of the reader, proverbial sayings, colloquial reportage, rhetoric repetition and, quoting Adeola James (1990:1), "the rambling that often characterises our style of greeting and passing on of information". Examples of this phenomenon are to be found in the work of Flora Nwapa and Catherine Obianuju Acholonu from Nigeria, Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana, Zaynab Alkali from northern Nigeria, Ellen Kuzwayo and Gcina Mhlophe from South Africa, and Mariama Bâ from Senegal. The influence of the oral tradition – with its emphasis on clear communication – on the written narratives of African women also reveals itself in the inclination towards linguistic clarity, simplicity and a linear narrative pattern. This partly explains the form of classic realism, often used by the older generation, but also by many of the younger writers. Broadly speaking, this sense of kinship with the oral tradition as a collective experience, is regarded as one of the factors that bind together much of African women's writing in all its diversity. The elusive contours of a definable aesthetics for African women's writing is beginning to take shape through, amongst other factors, the universal references, both implicit and explicit, to the shared oral tradition (Bryce 1992:209).

Another problem, in addition to the slow and inadequate documentation of orature, is the actual publication of written work by women – or lack



thereof. Many aspiring and even published African women writers express how difficult it is to become and to remain published. Many publishing houses regard it as not being profitable to publish African women's work, because of its limited readership. One of the reasons for this limited readership is that English writing is only accessible to a small percentage of the African population, in the case of West Africa to only twenty per cent of the local population. The other eighty per cent are illiterate in English. Even work published in the indigenous languages are often inaccessible to the local population, because of general illiteracy or poverty, which minimises the purchase of literature.

Other publishing problems are also encountered. The writer Marietou Mbaye, for example, had been quite prepared to publish under her own name, but her publishers insisted on a male pseudonym. Her work was therefore published under the name Ken Bugul, by which she is now known. In similar vein, Buchi Emecheta was approached by a publisher who was prepared to publish her work on condition that she wrote under the name Edith Smith or a similar English-sounding name. She declined this offer.

The politics of publishing are regarded as a stumbling block by many African woman writers, especially, as Adeola James (1990:4) says, in neo-colonial societies, where publishing is dominated by multinational companies. Commenting on these publishers, the Kenyan writer, Asenath Odaga (in James 1990:130) says: "They are here not to develop local writers but to make money. They only accept what they think will sell internationally. If it is something local they accept it only when they are convinced that it will get into the schools." Whether positive or negative, it is an irrefutable fact that these publishing houses have been very influential in directing African literature. In Britain Heinemann has, especially with its African Writers series since its inception in 1958, been instrumental in establishing and determining the canon for African literature. Other influential publishers are Longman, with its more popular Drumbeat series, and Macmillan with its successful mass-market Pacesetters series. Women are best represented in the latter. Lately, the Oxford University Press New Fiction from Africa series has also published work by African women.

Because of a shortage of publishing opportunities some African women have established their own publishing houses. Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa from Nigeria established presses – Emecheta's Ogunwa Afor and Nwapa's Tana Press – mainly to publish their own work. Aminata Sow Fall and Asenath Odaga have started their own publishing houses with a different goal in mind. Fall's organisation, Centre d'Animations et des échanges Culturelles (CAEC), which includes a pub-

lishing house, specifically aims at encouraging other writers. And Odaga (in James 1990:131) explains her goal as helping "in the development of ... African literature. Also to encourage young people to write and to encourage reading, because people will read when there is something to read. I won't make lots of money, but I hope I will make a lot of literature. The majority of illiterates are women, and it is about time we did something about this".

## II

Rather than a historical focus, *The Torn Veil* has a regional focus on the large and geopolitically diverse continent of Africa, with its vast differences of ethnicity, languages, and colonial and national histories. Instead of following a chronological format, the stories are therefore rather loosely grouped according to the four major geographical regions: North, East, South and Western Africa. Within each of these categories, stories from the same countries are grouped together, irrespective of oral or written origin. A few stories, such as those from the Congo and the former Zaïre, would probably have fitted better into a Central African category, but for the sake of convenience, are included in the West African section. The focus on region is not altogether unproblematic, because people are mobile. Broadly speaking, I have tried to focus on writers who were born in Africa and identify with Africa or who lived in Africa for most of their lives. These include women of different races, religions, cultures and nationalities. Unfortunately, not all writers who deserve to be represented in this anthology are included. There are mainly two reasons for this. We could not get permission to reprint some writers' work. In other instances, rights to reprint were simply unaffordable.

Only stories originally written in English or stories translated from other languages into English are included. Unfortunately this inhibits the possibilities of selecting especially from the Arabic and French-speaking regions. One also has to keep in mind that the few French and, especially, Arabic African women's stories that have appeared in English translation hardly represent the quantity and variety of stories which have been produced. According to Jane Bryce (1992:201), of all the debates surrounding African literature, the language debate is the most vexed. One opinion in this debate is that the indigenous languages are the only languages in which one can truly express one's culture and identity as an African, maintain one's culture and address one's own people and children. Others say that colonialism cannot be denied and has inscribed itself, above all, in language. Added to this

statement is the argument that the market dictates that literature should be produced in English and French, and that only these languages are accessible to an international readership. Therefore literature can be published only in these languages by the multinational publishers, on which African literature is to a large extent dependent (see Bryce 1992: 201).

Aware of this language debate, I have for the North African region in this collection relied heavily on the translations done by or for Charlotte Bruner's two collections of African women's writing, entitled *Unwinding Threads* (1983) and *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing* (1993). These two collections by Bruner were the first serious and successful attempts at documenting African women's writing, and are regarded as groundbreaking work. *Unwinding Threads* has shown that African women are indeed productive in the literary field, and *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing* indicated how their local and international readership and exposure, and women writers' awareness of each other's existence and productivity and the tradition they have established, have changed the position, status and nature of this genre in the decade between these two publications. Half a decade later, *The Torn Veil* brings these two phases together, reflecting on the past and exposing the exciting new facets of the present.

This anthology also intends to challenge the essentialist views held by many people regarding African women's writing and African culture. This is achieved by including stories diverse in tone, style, contents and structure. Thematically, this also reflects the differences in approach towards issues such as feminism, religion, culture, the woman's role in the family, community and workforce, political issues, colonialism, and many others. The false homogeneity of African culture, imposed by colonialism on Africa as a continent and also on the various large geographical African areas, is thus challenged by these stories representation of an extensive African diversity.

### III

Within this diversity, one is nevertheless able to identify certain similar thematic tendencies that coincide mainly with shared experiences related to changes in the areas of state politics and gender politics. One such theme is the writers' narration of autobiographical stories through which their own identities as women of Africa are explored and asserted. The harshness of the African continent on different levels is another frequently observed theme. Then there are also the modern and popular romantic themes.

State-related political issues recorded in the narratives of African women

often focus on the contradictions caused by a traditional society infiltrated by Western or colonial influences. These contradictions or tensions seem to occur in mainly two phases. The first phase occurs during colonial rule, with the direct and overt influences of Western colonial rule. The second phase begins with the withdrawal of colonial rule, and is characterized by a cultural self-assertion in tension with, as Jane Bryce (1992:201) defines it, "the neo-colonial mentality" of the new ruling elite. Different approaches to these contradictions are encountered in the stories. Some writers focus on the atrocities caused by the colonialist and European governments. Many South African writers use this thematic approach to reveal the destruction of individuals, families and whole communities, caused by the previous racist government. In "Dimomona" Miriam Tlali tells the sad story of how a respectable couple and their family lose everything as a result of a triviality when a man forgets to take his pass with him to the outside toilet of his shack.

Then there are also many stories which focus on periods of political transition, such as in South Africa when the white minority government is challenged by a new upcoming order. Stories such as Sindiwe Magona's "I'm Not Talking About That, Now" deals with the confusing and disturbing contradictions encountered during this transitional phase. On one hand, a black family is oppressed by a racist government which they abhor. On the other hand, it is not easy for them to fight this without dismantling their own family unit and abandoning traditional principles. This causes tension and fractures within the family, and ironically turns the family members against each other. Furthermore, this story also demonstrates a mother's confusion regarding her own role as a traditional nurturing and caring mother in opposition to her role as an oppressed black woman fighting for her people's dignity. She prioritises according to what she regards as being her most important role – that of the nurturing mother. Ironically this puts her in direct opposition to the children she chooses to care for. This story reminds one of the deadlocked position of the African woman that Pollard (1992:186) mentions in her discussion of the East African writer, Rebecca Njau's novel *Ripples in the Pool* (1975).

Other writers focus on reclaiming the African past – a popular theme in the 1960s. Many of these celebrate the diversity and richness of the pre-colonial past in defence of threatened traditions. Phyllis Pollard (1992:183) says that "destroying the colonial myth that Africa, before the arrival of the Europeans, was without a history, and recording African traditions at a time when they seemed to be rapidly disappearing" was, and still is, "an urgent task" for many writers. Barbara Kimenye's stories in her two anthologies of Uganda village tales, *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966), from

which "The Winner" in this collection is taken, provide examples of this theme. Ellen Kuzwayo is another writer who celebrates the positive attributes of traditional practices. In "One of Many" she demonstrates the positive qualities of the traditional family unit, the familial responsibilities of members towards each other, and the important role a traditional mother plays in keeping her family united despite geographical distance.

Celebrating the African past or tradition is, however, not an unproblematic theme for those narrators who are aware of the destructive agencies at work in the very same traditional societies, such as the strong force of patriarchy. The Nigerian critic Omalara Ogundipe-Leslie (in Pollard 1992:184) states that it is easier to counteract the colonial influences imposed from outside than to eliminate generations of tradition from within African society. Several writers go beyond recollecting the precolonial history and demystifying traditional life, by also indicating how the traditionally male-defined history is often contradictory to the stories of sexism women recollect of the past. Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo are writers who often employ this theme.

Another theme related to the overlapping of traditional and Western ways in Africa is an exploration, on one hand, of the possibility of reconciling Christianity and traditional cultural practices and, on the other hand, of how both these practices confine women in similar and different ways. This theme, in an adapted form, is especially popular in the writing of Indian women in Africa. In "The Spirit of Two Worlds" Jayapraga Reddy demonstrates how an Indian family is traumatised by the clashes between traditional and modern lifestyles, between Christian and Moslem beliefs, and how, in the end, "the spirit of two worlds had emerged in a new beginning".

Patriarchy in religion is also an important theme in North African stories especially, such as Latifa el-Zayat's "The Picture" and Alifa Rifaat's "Distant View of a Minaret".

Gender-related issues in African women's stories mostly focus on the contradiction between their traditional perceptions of their gender roles as submissive wives and nurturing self-effacing mothers, and an increasing need to be liberated from these traditional expectations through education, employment, professional career success, financial independence, wealth and personal self-fulfilment. A story that deals with the contradiction between what is traditionally expected of the woman and her critical awareness of how this can make her a prisoner, is Bessie Head's "The Collector of Treasures". Ama Ata Aidoo's "The Girl Who Can" also tells the story of a girl who is shunned for not having legs to carry childbearing hips. This social gender expectation comes in conflict with her own needs

for self-fulfilment. She eventually proves that she can be successful in her own way outside rigid traditional gender prescriptions – something the older women never thought possible.

This theme also occurs in the context of subtle psychological contradictions. Zoë Wicomb, in “When the Train Comes”, illustrates the confusion of a young sexually maturing girl, who on one hand wants boys to look at her in order to know that she is sexually acceptable in their eyes, but on the other hand, sees it as a transgression of her sexuality. She thinks: “I am not the kind of girl whom boys look at. I have known this for a long time, but I still lower my head in public and peep through my lashes. Their eyes leap over me, a mere obstacle in a line of vision. I should be pleased; boys can use their eyes shamelessly to undress a girl”.

Frequent themes related to an increasing gender awareness also include the sexist treatment of women, polygamy, male infidelity rooted in this polygamous tradition, the fear of AIDS, prostitution, contempt for infertile women and the suffering imposed on childless women, female circumcision, and female sacrifice. This last theme is dealt with in Grace Ogot’s “The Rain Came” and Gbemi’s “There’s Always a Way Out”, in which the father sells his daughters to make money in order to become a chief and in this way improve his social status. Alifa Rifaat’s “Distant View of a Minaret” offers an interesting perspective on the sexual exploitation of women. This story reverses the theme of men demanding sex from their wives whenever it suits them. Here the husband denies his wife any sexual pleasure, but she serves him dutifully until his death. She discovers his death when she goes to his room to serve him coffee – “he liked to have the coffee poured out in front of him”. After she has informed the son and the doctor of his death, her own life starts, symbolised by her drinking the coffee she prepared for *him*: “She returned to the living room and poured out the coffee for herself. She was surprised at how calm she was”. Nawal el Saadawi’s story, “She Was the Weaker”, deals with traditional social gender expectations regarding man’s virility and woman’s virginity. When no blood is to be found on the wedding bed, the man escapes social contempt by accusing his innocent bride of not being a virgin. He does this in order to hide his own impotence: “The bride appeared at the threshold, her small head under the red shawl hanging in dejection, burning and accusing looks thrown at her from all sides ...”.

Countless stories deal with the theme of violent men abusing their wives physically, such as Marjorie J. Mbilinyi’s “A Woman’s Life”, in which the abused wife sees no way out of her situation, but hopes for a better life for her daughter: “Thecla, maybe for you it can be different. Maybe you won’t be stuck like me, lying home late at night, waiting for some man to come

home, waiting for the sound of his footsteps to know what kind of a man he will be that night. But you have to *make* it different. For me ... I don't know how." Joey Muller's "The Will of the Lord" is another example of this theme, but with a more positive outcome when the simple and dutiful Tant Hanna is victorious over her violent husband. This story portrays the contradictions when traditional gender expectations – such as a woman's submissive role (often defended as a Christian virtue) – come into conflict with Christian values. Tant Hanna interprets "The Will of the Lord" according to her simple and straightforward understanding of a sermon she attends, and in her dutiful obedience, ironically, liberates herself from her husband's violent temper.

Stories about women's suffering under polygamy are numerous. Zaynab Alkali tells in "Saltless Ash" the entertaining story of how two wives prevent their husband from marrying a third. And an excerpt from Mariama Bâ's novel included in this anthology, *So Long a Letter* (for which she received the first Noma Award), deals with an older woman's pain when her husband decides to take a second wife. Charlotte H. Bruner (1983:33) says about this excerpt: "Bâ epitomises the feelings of rejection a modern African woman may experience when, in a changing climate of opinion, she does have some choice in the direction of her life, but may not dare to break tradition and opt for total independence".

The pain experienced by childless women is explored in many stories. In some the pain of childlessness is expressed on a purely personal and psychological level, such as in Rachelle Greeff's moving story, "Tell Him It Is Never Too Late" and Flora Nwapa's "The Child Thief". In both these stories the childless women invent their own ways of coping with their pain. In Aminata Maïga-Ka's "New Life at Tandia", the pain is aggravated by social pressure, social contempt and the traditional belief that being childless is punishment for sins committed in the past.

Infidelity is another popular theme. In "For Better Or For Worse" Vee Ndlovu narrates the story of how a man's infidelity results in him infecting his wife and son with the AIDS virus. The didactical and pragmatic tone of this story is a typical trait of African narratives which often prefer a functional aesthetic, and where feminism is involved, a pragmatic feminism. In this regard, the Kenyan writer, Muthoni Likimani (in Pollard 1992:186), says that literature should preferably be about "issues" and Penina Muhando (in Pollard 1992:187), who is also committed to didactical writing which is directly concerned with social problems, says that there is no place in Tanzania for "art for art's sake".

As in the case of stories with a state-political theme, there are also gen-

der-political stories that are hopeful and positive, such as Marguerite Amrouche's "The Story of the Chest" and Penniah A. Ogada's "A Case for Inheritance". In the latter Ana refuses to obey traditional custom that goes against her own principles and against her love for her husband.

Another general theme is autobiographical narration. This is often presented as fiction. Personal elements or full personal accounts are, for example, found in the work of Fadhma Amrouche, Buchi Emecheta, Mabel Segun, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, Adelaide Casely-Hayford, Baba of Karo, Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, Ellen Kuzwayo, Maria Tholo, Joan Baker and Gladys Thomas. This autobiographically informed work is important in the light of the following words by Adeola James (1990:2): "It has been suggested that the situation of women is the key to a critique of society. If that is the case, what women writers have to say about their societies should receive serious attention." In similar vein, Jane Bryce (1992:206) regards work which draws on the writers' personal experiences as "important documents of an often repressed social reality" – important especially in the context of African women establishing a self-defined identity. The Senegalese feminist writer, Awa Thiam, asks in *La Parole aux négresses* (1978): "What use will it be to write of the black woman if by her writing we do not learn who she really is? It is the task of black women to re-establish the truth".

Another theme that often features directly or indirectly in stories by African women is the different levels of harshness that characterise the African continent. In Joey Muller's "The Will of the Lord" we read: "Life was hard for those dwelling on the harsh Karoo. They were a hardy people and humbly worshipped a hard God". Riana Scheepers's "The Scribe" explores this issue by combining the forces of an unkind nature and an unkind husband against a woman who is dependent on both of them and remains submissive to both of them. Added to this, her illiteracy in a world where the written word rules makes it possible for the last vestige of control she tries to have over her life to be taken away from her. Doris Lessing's "A Sunrise on the Veld" is another delicate portrayal of the intimate interaction between man and nature.

Another harsh reality of the African continent, encountered in many stories, is man's brutal fight against man. This manifests in political or tribal oppositions, or factions in civil wars, often resulting from Africa's colonial legacy. Maria Tholo's diary about the 1976 uprising in the Cape Town townships and Corlia Fourie's "Tombani and Thoko" both illustrate the brutality of a divided society. Tholo's account refers to the experiences of adults in violent urban townships, while in Fourie's story the reader encounters two



young girls from a rural setting who are forced to create their own coping skills when violence takes over every corner of their lives. Thoko creates “a world where snakes are outwitted and birds talk to people”, while Tombani “knew she will have to live with the terror. It was now in her. She could smell it on her skin and hear it breathing in her ears”. Then there are also stories, like Nadine Gordimer’s “The Gentle Art”, in which she describes the sometimes fragile and gentle appearance of brutal realities and tensions between people, and between man and nature. In this story Gordimer explores the subtle presence and almost invisibility of these tensions between man and nature.

Apart from the above-mentioned thematic orientations, the emergence of a genre of popular literature has brought the themes of Western-style romance fiction into the work of many African women writers. Much of this work is published for Macmillan’s Pacesetter series and is aimed at the recently literate urban reader, and as Phyllis Pollard (1992:187) says, has an ethos that is “urban, individualistic and materialistic, with the pursuit of happiness as the overriding theme”.

According to Adeola James (1990:4), the pervasive theme of African women’s writing can be summarised as “the shared journey towards a new dawn for women and for Africa”. This theme is visible in the many stories about women who move away from being victims of their circumstances and who, as Marjorie J. Mbilinji says in her story, “A Woman’s Life”, “make it different for themselves”, rise above it, and challenge their fate successfully. This “new dawn” is also found in stories such as Corlia Fourie’s “Tombani and Thoko”, Farida Karodia’s “Seeds of Discontent”, Jayapraga Reddy’s “The Spirit of Two Worlds”, Alifa Rifaat’s “Distant View of a Minaret”, Efua Sutherland’s “New Life at Kyerefaso” and Bessie Head’s “The Collector of Treasures”.

#### IV

Hopefully these stories will help to give us a better understanding of African women’s experiences in order to bring about change on a continent where gender equality is still a veiled dream. As Sheila R. Johansson (1976:427) says, “the nature of long-term social change will never be understood unless the study of women becomes a part of any attempt to unravel the mysteries of their past and perceive the dim outlines of the future”. Hopefully this will also encourage more women from this versatile continent to tell their stories with pride and courage and to rewrite social and intellectual scripts for the