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9. ABSTRACT
 This study explores the most frequently recurring images and perceptions of women in the imaginative literatures of Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, and Jamaica; it provides an analysis of these images to provoke alternative ways of viewing some of the persistent problems in the area of women in development. It also provides a cultural frame of reference to be used by program designers in devising and revising strategies to integrate women into the development processes of the countries concerned. The study is organized around four main areas; work and food production, motherhood and the value of children, the structure of the family, and health and nutrition. The study consists of five sections, one devoted to the literature of each country, and a final section on African-Caribbean cultural transfers. Each section is preceded by a brief synopsis, highlighting the major findings in the four subject areas concerned and followed by conclusions relevant to the development process. Most of the literature included was published in the last 20 to 25 years. In addition to imaginative works, analytic works have also been used to complement and to supplement the literary images. The project was structured in two phases; phase 1 encompassed the research and analysis of materials available in the U.S.; in phase 2 the author traveled to the four countries to obtain materials and to verify findings and conclusions. The persistent problems met by women in development are recurring themes in the artistic works of these LOCs.

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IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE
LITERATURES OF SELECTED
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
(Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, Jamaica)

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(Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, Jamaica)**

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**Pacific Consultants
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INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken by Pacific Consultants under the auspices of the Office of Women in Development, Agency for International Development:

- to explore some of the most frequently recurring images and perceptions of women in the imaginative literatures of four lesser developed countries (LDC) funded by AID: Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, Jamaica;
- to provide analysis and interpretation of these images so as to shed new light on and provoke alternative ways of viewing some of the persistent problems in the area of women in development;
- to provide a cultural frame of reference to be used by program designers in devising and revising strategies to integrate women into the development processes of the countries concerned.

Not surprisingly, a large number of the persistent problems encountered in the area of women in development are recurring themes in the artistic works of these developing countries, works which have been inspired by the highly refined social awareness and concern of the novelists, poets, and filmmakers of Africa and the Caribbean. From a list of these themes, four were selected because they represent high priority problems in integrating women into development:

- the question of work and food production;
- the question of motherhood and the value of children;
- the structure of the family and the question of the woman, sole head of household;
- the question of health and nutrition.

While the study focuses on and is organized around these four subject areas, other topics invariably worked their way into the discussion. For example, the role of religion in the woman's

perception of nutrition and health cannot be ignored; the question of the woman's social autonomy is tightly interwoven with that of the woman, sole head of household. In each area, we were particularly interested in the dominant perceptions of, about, and on the part of the woman and the important people in her life. For this reason, the term "interpersonal relations" recurs in the study. It is our opinion that the four areas discussed should be thought of in terms of the interpersonal relations in the lives of LDC women, instead of in wholly abstract terms. This is an additional perspective we urge the program designer to take into consideration. It is unique in having been drawn from imaginative literature, a rich source of information about cultural values and attitudes.

The body of this study consists of five sections, one devoted to the literature of each country, and a final section on African-Caribbean cultural transfers. Each section is preceded by a brief synopsis, highlighting the major findings in the four subject areas concerned, and followed by conclusions particularly relevant to the development process.

Most of the works of imaginative literature included were published in the last twenty to twenty-five years. Some important works prior to that time were also included. We focused mainly on fiction--short and long--because its narrative form offers detailed images of the social and cultural mosaic. The novels singled out were those especially representative of lower-class women. We did not include the poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor, for example, because it presents a kind of mythic and abstract image of the African woman, which does

not easily lend itself to sociological interpretation. Similarly, other writings were excluded because they focused on the social elite of the country in question. Some novels, written by men and women, concerned women whose lives were as totally removed from the peasant woman as the lives of wealthy, sophisticated Parisiennes. Still other works by men and women, of poetry, for example, were not pertinent to the four subject areas under consideration.

In addition, colonial literature, works by Englishmen and Frenchmen on Africa and the Caribbean, were not used. This would constitute a separate study in itself. Similarly, we did not discuss the African or Caribbean perceptions of the European.

We included magazine articles, which provide both factual and perceptual data on LDC women. (Africa Woman magazine, quoted frequently in this study, contained articles on Ghanaian, Senegalese, and Jamaican women, but not a single article on Haitian women.) A large number of Senegalese films in particular were included because film is a major artistic medium in Senegal and because these films were highly pertinent to the problems of women in development.

In addition to imaginative works, analytic works have also been used to both complement and supplement the literary images. It was important, for example, to discuss the anthropological and sociological literature concerning matriliney, matriarchy, and matrifocality at the beginning of the different sections in order to explain the powerful role the African woman has traditionally played in her society and to clarify the differences as well as the similarities between the African and the Caribbean woman's social status.

(The terms "matriliny" and "matriarchy" are explained at the beginning of the Ghana section; the term "matrifocality," at the beginning of the Haiti section.)

This project was structured in two phases: Phase I encompassed the research and analysis of materials available in the United States; Phase II calls for the author to travel to the four countries examined in this study to supplement U.S. research, to obtain materials currently unavailable in the U.S., and to seek verification of the findings and conclusions presented in this study.

Research for Phase I was begun on September 19, 1977 and continued until approximately the second week in February 1978. The writing was done between February 13 and March 13, 1978. The first two and a half weeks of the research period were devoted to bibliographic work, assembling lists and references of authors and their works, consulting the National Union Catalogue at the Library of Congress to ascertain the whereabouts of the works--if they were not in the Library of Congress' collection. In about the second week in October, reading in African literature was begun. Approximately one month was devoted to each country's literature. During this period, bibliographic research was ongoing, as one reference led to another. Because the original proposal called for the inclusion of some Central American literatures, a fair number of days at the beginning were devoted to this area. Ultimately, it was decided that four literatures were sufficient, and that the four in particular (Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, and Jamaica) formed a culturally cohesive block.

The African and Caribbean collection of the Library of Congress provided a very large number of works--many more than could be read during this period. In addition, the New York Public Library, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York), Columbia University Library, The Research Institute for the Study of Man (Caribbean material; New York), Northwestern University Library, and Yale University Library were facilities used.

It is important to mention that third world literature is neglected by the majority of commercial publishers and is poorly represented in most university curricula. Even Comparative Literature programs focus almost exclusively on western works. Thus, because of a lack of organization and an unevenness of third world literary materials in the United States, research in this area was sometimes frustrating. But more important, because of the new vistas it unveiled, it was highly rewarding.

The imaginative literature of the developing world has often been thought of as scanty--as compared with that of the United States and Europe. In fact, there is a long tradition of oral literature throughout Africa, some of which has been recorded and translated by specialists in those countries. (This is an area only touched on in this study via discussion of the folktale.) In addition, the West African countries have produced several generations of writers in English and French, so that the volume of African written literature in western languages is of considerable size.

The Ghanaian and Jamaican works read for this study were written in English; the Senegalese and Haitian works, in French. In all of the four literatures, elements of either African or Caribbean dialects are found.

Some of the Ghanaian and Jamaican works studied were originally published in England; the Senegalese and Haitian in France. Others were published in the LDCs themselves. But publishing facilities in the African and Caribbean countries are still limited, though growing. Because many of the works originally published in French remain untranslated, some of the passages quoted from those works have been freely translated by this writer.

In analyzing and interpreting the African and Caribbean works, the effort has been made not to mistake the visible tip of the iceberg for the whole. Because of time and research (U.S. only) limitations, this was all the more important. This study is not meant to be definitive. We did not attempt to provide answers, but to underscore some of the recurring questions and perceptions about women in four developing countries. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further insight into the problems that remain.

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Ghana: Synopsis

In the Ghana section, the traditions of matriliney and matriarchy are discussed in order to demonstrate the Ghanaian woman's major familial status. Generally speaking, the following points ought to be considered in integrating Ghanaian women into the development process:

- Ghanaian women have always played a major role in agriculture and possessed a high degree of economic independence.
- The state of motherhood is revered and overlaps with every other area of the woman's life; barrenness is unacceptable.
- Ghanaian family structure is unlike that of the western nuclear family; the extended family is very important. There are many women who are sole heads of households needing development assistance.
- Ghanaian women are in great need of health and nutrition assistance and are usually receptive to development aid in this area, if the developer is sensitive to their values and customs, including style of communication and demonstration. We suggest that the western developer might best work in tandem with a Ghanaian woman who speaks the dialects. In addition, the developer should consider that the elder women of the community often tend to wield considerable authority in the area of health.

Work and Food Production: Literary findings indicate the major role of Ghanaian women in agriculture, in trading, and their economic independence. They illustrate that the woman is perceived as possessing a mystical, awesome power in the area of food growing, and that this is perceived as being akin to her even more awesome power of childbearing. Relatedly, the rejection by a man of food prepared by his wife is regarded as an insult, so great is the cultural significance of food.

In numerous literary pieces, the spiritual and interpersonal dimensions of all work are emphasized as well as the perceptions of the

traditional woman's work role. Literary passages illustrate the independence, wisdom, and the strength of the working woman, as well as the occurrence of male-female role reversals in the area of work.

The struggle of the lower class rural and urban woman to support herself and her family--often singlehandedly--is a recurring theme. Other literary examples illustrate the work role played by children who must work in order to eat.

The famous market women of Ghana are discussed; literary examples are given to demonstrate their attitudes and role in society.

Question of Motherhood; the Value of Children: Imaginative as well as analytic literary findings emphasize the psychological and social importance of childbearing in African society, and the total unacceptability of the barren woman. We describe the personal anguish of the childless woman and the social ostracism with which she must cope. Both imaginative and analytic literary references are used to illustrate the integral role of childbearing in all aspects of a woman's life. This sub-section is particularly important.

The Woman, Sole Head of Household; Polygamy: Our findings reveal the relationship of the woman, sole household head to the extended family, stressing that a husband's support is very often replaced by support from kin, and that the African family is not the typical western nuclear family unit. Literary examples illustrate the struggle the woman, sole household head faces both economically and emotionally. Separation from husband and kin often intensifies the mother-child bond; at the same time, older children must bear some of the economic and emotional responsibility of a parent.

The controversy over polygamy, as it is represented in journalistic literature, is presented and literary examples are given of the pressure and conflict polygamous women face.

Health and Nutrition: Research indicates increased efforts in nutrition education in rural areas. Literary findings reveal the ubiquitous obstacles to good health: poverty; cultural and religious customs, such as religious food taboos and fetish cures.

Before discussing the images of women in Ghanaian literature, it is necessary to examine the proverbial strength and independence of Ghanaian women, qualities which, if not directly referred to in the works, are usually assumed.

It is the Akan woman, well-known for her tradition of matriliney, with whom we are particularly concerned. ("Matriliney" refers to the cultural system in which descent and inheritance are traced through the maternal line. The term "matriarchy" also refers to female descent and inheritance but includes other cultural elements whereby the woman's social and political status is equal or superior to the man's, i.e., political or agricultural autonomy. The term "matriarchal" is also used to describe the status and power of the woman (African and Caribbean) in the family.) The Akan group, comprising approximately one-third of the total population and including numerous dialect subgroups, is a coastal as well as a hinterland people, occupying the southern half of Ghana.¹ For this reason, Akan women have been particularly influenced by urban change and the evolution of the economic and educational systems, while retaining many traditional life-ways of the hinterland. The novels, short stories, and other literary pieces discussed below, whose authors are principally Akan, reflect the Ghanaian woman's dilemma of modern vs. traditional values. A brief discussion of matriliney will provide a useful background.

Christine Oppong, a scholar and authority on Akan marriage systems, describes matrilineal kinship this way:

Segments of the most inclusive matrilineage in a community are defined by reference to a recent common ancestress, to whom members trace matrilineal descent. These are often said to be people whose maternal grandmothers and mother's mother's brothers, were brothers and sisters and grew up together with one mother in one household. It is in this 'family' unit that control over people and property are effectively held at the domestic level. The head of this group is a wofa, mother's brother, not a lineage head. He is the guardian of dependent members, accepting and offering marriage payments, and in former times arranging cross-cousin marriages and holding the power to pawn junior members when necessary. The elementary units of which this lineage segment and the maximal lineage is formed consist of uterine siblings, brothers and sisters and the sister's children, who perpetuate the group as heirs and successors of their maternal uncles. The absolutely binding tie within the matrilineage is that between mother and child.²
[My ital.]

Traditionally, the rules of matrilineage governed those of ownership, inheritance, marriage and divorce. Thus, not only was the conjugal relationship a subfunction of matrikin bonds, but both marriage and procreation were essentially means of continuing and fortifying the matrilineage. Cross-cousin unions, mentioned in the above quote, were a biological strategy to reconcile conjugal, filial, and matrikin responsibilities. The tendency for young people to take spouses from their own or adjoining communities was a geographical strategy to avoid cleavage between two sets of matrikin. Further, spouses tended not to reside in the same household but with their respective matrikin; the wife would come to her husband in the evening with the meal she had prepared and would spend the night with him.³ Today, although economic and

educational changes work against matrilineal family groupings, matrilineality is still a powerful force in the culture.

Robert Sutherland Rattray, a British anthropologist who spent many years among the Ashanti (Akan) people, collected their proverbs and showed how they are a repository of cultural values. Here are a few Ashanti proverbs referring to the mother:

Bent stick in the spirit grove, when your mother is dead that is the end of your family. [i.e., The mother is regarded as the family head as descent is traced through her.]

The family is an army, and your own mother's child is your real kinsman. [i.e., brother or sister]

When my father's children get (anything), I like that; when (my) mother's children get (anything), I like that even better. [One's father may have children by other women; these are not regarded as one's own siblings.]⁴

Rattray notes: "Many of these proverbs illustrate ... the force and strength and unity of relationship on and through the female side, and the almost total disregard ... of any kinship tie on the father's side."⁵

(It should be added that, although a woman may be a lineage head, her brother controls the lineage females in marrying them, etc.⁶ This, as well as the frequent plight of widows in a matrilineal system, may be regarded as oppressive to the woman socially and economically. Be that as it may, the Ghanaian woman exercises a formidable strength and personal independence, as reflected in the literature.)

I. WORK AND FOOD PRODUCTION

Christine Oppong, quoted above, reminds us that " ... planting of food crops remains to a great extent the responsibility of the women." She continues: "The heavy involvement of women in agriculture may trace back to the period when men were mainly hunters and warriors. The idea that the man provides the meat and the women the food dies hard. ... The outcome of the women's hard work and enterprise as farmers and traders, their control of property separately from their husbands and the social and economic support of their matrikin, is that Akan women are widely noted for their social and economic independence. Some elderly women head their own houses of matrikin."⁷

Oppong quotes remarks by other sociologists on the Akan woman's industry; for example. "Women are, unless quite devoid of drive--economically independent ... most women produce more than they consume." And, "It is taken for granted that a woman will earn her own living"⁸

The following quote from a short story by Ama Ata Aidoo, a woman and one of Ghana's most outstanding writers, illustrates this fact. The quote is almost a commonplace in Ghanaian as well as in other African literatures. An elderly man Zirigu speaks of his wife Setu. They are Moslem and live in the hinterland: "She is a good woman. Like most of our women, she always believes in a woman having her own little money, so that she does not have to go to her husband for everything.

On the coast, she mostly sold roasted plantains and groundnuts. Here she makes kaffa." ⁹ If Setu has "her own little money," there are others who amass fortunes, as we shall see below.

To summarize: As Akan men were the hunters, the women became the food producers; this division of work was a life necessity. Eventually, women took almost full control of food production and sold (or traded) what they did not need for their own households. This in turn strengthened their economic independence as well as their traditional matrilineal status.

But there is another aspect of women's integral involvement with the process of food production: the women's knowledge of food growing is regarded as a kind of mysterious, even fearful, phenomenon in which she exercises a primordial power wholly her own. The analogy is clear: the woman's involvement with food growing is akin to her power of childbirth, equally mysterious. Both occur beneath the surface; both are "seasonal"; in both processes, the woman is parturient; because both are fundamental life-processes, both are extraordinarily close to death. And to repeat, both are exclusively woman's domain. (Although men do participate in food production, we are interested here in the perceptions--usually unconscious--of the process.)

A popular Ashanti folktale, "How Kwaku Ananse Was Punished for His Bad Manners," illustrates the mysterious relationship between women and food production. In the tale, Ntikuma, Ananse's son, goes out to the forest looking for food. Accidentally, some kola nuts slip out of his hand and down into

a hole, where he pursues them. At the bottom of the long, dark tunnel, he discovers an old woman who asks him as he lands on the ground, "Why have you come here?" "I was looking for food, grandmother," he answers. She sees that he is telling the truth, the story tells us, implying a special insight and super-rational knowledge on her part. Next, she defies logic and tests the boy's obedience and faith (in her) by instructing him to go out to the field and pick the yams that say "Do not take me," and not to pick those that say "Take me." He does this successfully and brings the yams back to the old woman. She then tells him to throw away the inside of the yam and cook and eat the outside. He obeys and eats well. She also eats, but through her nose. The story says that Ntikuma notices this but is too polite to remark on it. Finally, she instructs Ntikuma to take the smaller of the two drums from her room; when he is hungry, he is to speak the word "cover" to the drum and food will be produced. This too occurs as promised.

Now, Kwaku Ananse, Ntikuma's father, is "jealous of his son's success." He resolves to go the old woman the next day and "bring back something even better." The woman is obviously a witch, he says. Ananse's behavior is opposite to that of his son. He takes the wrong yams, cooks the inside against the old woman's instructions (it is inedible), and takes the big drum, thinking that it will yield more. He also criticises the old woman for eating through her nose. At home, he speaks the magic word "cover" to the drum and is instantly covered with sores and scabs. He flees in this sorry state. 10

The symbolic elements of the story are very strong, and it need not be emphasized that the old woman is a grandmother or mother figure, wise and privileged in secret matters of food growing and eating, who herself lives underground, as do the yams and other foods she grows. Although the story contrasts her with the father and the son above ground, she is perfectly willing to fulfill their food needs, if they respect her knowledge! Her age is significant and her expertise has earned her a position of authority.

Another example from Ghanaian literature of the mysterious rapport between women and food growing is found in a popular novel entitled Ordained by the Oracle. In this novel, Dora, the wife of a prosperous trader, Boateng, has died, and he must undergo the traditional rituals, viewed as a means of "ridding the widower of the spirit of the dead wife."¹¹ The eldest women of the community play the leading role in the carrying out of the rites. One of them, Madam Kai, describes to Boateng the food taboos he must observe: "1. You must not eat anything while the sun has not set and not more than once a day. 2. You must not eat anything growing underground and these include, cassava, yam, cocoyam."¹² It is the second taboo that is interesting in the light of the Ananse tale described above. In both literary pieces one finds the authority of the older woman, the grandmother, linked with the matter of food, especially food grown underground (a staple in many parts of Africa), and the mysterious, taboo-aura surrounding the entire matter.

Elsewhere in the literature, the earth itself is referred to as "earthmother." In The Leopard Priestess by Robert Sutherland Rattray, we learn that "it is a deadly sin to shed blood of your clan so that it falls on Mother Earth."¹³ This is an added element in the awe surrounding the process of food production and growing. And, as we shall see, the motherhood element is a very powerful one.

Other stories reflect the terrible insult inflicted by the rejection of food prepared by a woman. In another Ashanti tale, "How Death Came to Mankind," a young maiden is married by her father, Kwaku Ananse, to an old man in the forest who has collected the bodies of many dead animals. (He of course represents Death.) Kwaku Ananse reasons: "This is a great hunter and he must know the ways of animals very well to catch so many. I will marry my daughter to him and then we shall always be sure of a good supply of meat."¹⁴ The daughter gathers together her cooking pots and follows her father through the forest. When Kwaku Ananse visits his daughter the next day, she is sad and depressed. "How are you getting on with your husband, and did he enjoy your food?" "Alas, Father," she answers, "he has not spoken to me at all, nor will he taste my food. He has neither eaten nor drunk the whole time I have been here. He just works and works and takes no notice. Take me home with you ... he is the strangest old man and I am afraid of him." The father encourages her. "Have patience. He will eat soon and will then recognize you, for your cooking is excellent." ¹⁵

In two stories by Ama Ata Aidoo, we again find the symbolic refusal of food. In the first story, Maami Ama describes the hardness of her husband:

Kodjo Fi reduced my housekeeping money and sometimes he refused to give me anything at all. He wouldn't eat my food ... That planting time, although I was his first wife, he allotted to me the smallest, thorniest plot.¹⁶

Here food growing and preparation are linked as the husband thwarts his wife in both areas. In the second story, a husband refuses his wife's food because he is ashamed of having beaten her.

Since food production and preparation is so essential to the role of the woman as wife and mother, as sustainer of the well-being of the group, a husband's rejection of her food is perceived as a rejection of her. Kenneth Little, a prominent anthropologist and Africanist, writes:

The cooking of food has considerable symbolical significance in relationships between men and women in most African societies, including the urban as well as the rural situation. For a wife to refuse to cook for her husband is indicative of her extreme displeasure and tantamount almost to a sign that she is about to leave him. Similarly, for a husband to accept and eat food cooked for him by a woman other than his own wife or a relative is tantamount in her eyes to his committing adultery.¹⁷

The question of women and work in general in Ghanaian and other African literature is an all pervasive one, since all women work and since work is inextricably entwined with all other aspects of women's (and men's) lives. Work ensures continuity--of the crop, of the clan, of the spirit, all inalienable and interdependent values in the African mind.

By the same token, in African culture opposing forces--darkness and light, male and female, death and birth--ideally coexist in a system of reciprocity. One force does not dominate but complements its opposite. Thus work guarantees continuity and is a means of maintaining balance and complementarity in the group: A woman works for her children, and her children will work for her when she is old. Her husband makes his just contribution. This is the ideal.

Work, traditionally, was "rhythmed"; it flowed gracefully with other parts of life: rest, play, religion. (It was literally rhythmed, often accompanied by chants and clapping of hands.) The meaning of work was derived from these other parts of life--rest, work, religion--as long as they were maintained in balance. This was and still is the ideal of work for the African woman as reflected in the literature--imaginative and analytic.

We wish to stress also that the woman's relationship to work is a beautiful and fragile one, intimately bound up with her role as mother, wife, and kinswoman. At the same time, the African woman is the very paradigm of strength where work is concerned. And she is pragmatic: survival is always pragmatic. But the meaning of work includes spiritual levels of intense concern for loved ones, intense self-respect, for the rural woman intense involvement with natural forces--rain, drought, good and bad soil, etc.

Although the ideal of work is one of balance between men

and women, it is often said that African women work harder than men, performing all the childbearing and childrearing tasks as well as household chores, in addition to agricultural work, and selling. This is most eloquently described in the following passages from Two Thousand Seasons, an extraordinary epic novel by Ayi Kwei Armah, one of Ghana's most important young writers. (The title refers to the "two thousand seasons of destruction" of the African people: their oppression by the Arabian tribes, the imposition of Islam, the horror of slavery, their cultural exploitation by the colonial master.) Armah describes the loss of the "way of reciprocity" of his people, first through the warring among clans, sapping the energy of the entire tribe. This was the men's war. Then the women took up the burden:

So the end of the rule of the fathers was violent.
The beginning of the rule of women was not. ...

The masculine carnage had exhausted everyone. As after all destruction, there was much heavy building left to do, and after that there still remained the steady, patient work of maintenance. For this the men ... showed no extraordinary stomach, preferring to sit in the shade of large bodwe trees or beneath the cool grass of huts built by women, drinking ahey, breathing the flattering air of the shade, in their heads congratulating the tribe of men for having found such easy means to spare itself the little inconveniences of work while yet enjoying so much of its fruit--so easy it is for men's feet to dance off the way of reciprocity. [My Ital.]¹⁸

Armah goes on in this ironic tone describing the total imbalance between the women's work and men's leisure. The men grew fat and lazy, not only on food and drink, but on fantasies of the "heroic work" awaiting them; in the meantime, they "generously welcomed the women into all real work proclaiming between

calabashes of sweet ahey how obvious it was that all such work was of its nature trivial, easy, light and therefore far from a burden on any woman."¹⁹ While the women worked all day in the fields, the men sat in the shade of the nearby trees, "guarding against danger." But as danger never came, the men gradually withdrew altogether to the "fragrant breweries of ahey." "The women were maintainers, the women were their own protectresses, finders and growers both,"²⁰ Armah writes. When drought came, "the men grew eloquent describing to each other the terrors of a long dryness." while the women, one Yaniba in particular, "obsessed with [their] people's need of water,"²¹ searched for the source of the dry river and finally discovered a rich pool of spring water. The women forbade the men to use the scarce water to brew their ahey, "but already the ahey had brought forth a strange, new kind of man, his belly like that of a pregnant woman's, of a habit to consume more food and drink than he gives out in work and energy."²² As the men had reached the extreme of irresponsibility,

It came simply, the rule of women, They razed the men's unearned privileges, refused to work to supply the unnecessary wants of men. All enjoyment, the new order said, was to be the result of work accomplished.²³

In this novel, which spans centuries, Armah is emphasizing not only the conservative role women play in food production (and water usage) but the superior strength of character and body, the force of will, the unfailing foresight and wisdom they exercise in ensuring the continuity of the group. Here men are dependent on women physically and ultimately spiritually.

In the same novel, Armah describes the young woman Anoa, namesake of a legendary priestess, who refuses to learn the traditional "mother chores" taught to young girls and insists on learning hunting with the boys. Not only does she learn but she masters hunting, and then turns to remind her mentors that "Aggressive hunting [is] against our way."²⁴ Finally she warns her people that they have wandered from their way. With a wisdom beyond her years she says:

The way is not the rule of men. The way is never women ruling men. The way is reciprocity. The way is not barrenness. Nor is the way this heedless fecundity. The way is not blind productivity. The way is creation knowing its purpose, wise in the withholding of itself from snares, from destroyers.²⁵

Ama Ata Aidoo has written a very powerful play entitled Anowa based on the legendary figure referred to above in Two Thousand Seasons. Aidoo's Anowa also has original ideas on the question of work, as she does on most other aspects of her life. Anowa announces to her mother, unhappy with Anowa's choice of husband, that she is going to work alongside him: "You will be surprised to know that I am going to help him do something with his life."²⁶ But even Kofi Ako her husband misunderstands and fails to appreciate the unusual spirit of his young wife. She works harder than he does, sacrifices her portion of the food to him, and strongly objects to his purchasing slaves to help them with the work. He tells her, "Ei, Anowa. You ought to have been born a man."²⁷ And watching her sleeping:

Sometimes, I do not understand. Wherever we go, people take you for my sister at first. They say they have never head of a woman who helped her husband so. 'Your wife is good' they say 'for your sisters are the only women you can force to toil like this for you Anowa truly has a few strong ideas. But I know she will settle down.²⁸

Yet Anowa's rejection of the traditional roles of the woman in her society, including that of "woman's work," causes the dissolution of her marriage and her own great unhappiness. "I cannot be happy if I am going to stop working," she tells her husband. When he suggests that she look after the house to keep busy, she replies, "No. I am going to marry you to a woman who shall do that."²⁹ Working hard, toward a goal she can only vaguely sense, seems to be the only thing that gives Anowa's life meaning. She would like her husband to feel the same way, especially as work is a means of uniting them as equals in the search for fulfillment, but he is interested in amassing riches and slaves, and does. The significance of Aidoo's play with respect to work and women is very similar to that of Two Thousand Seasons and the idea of reciprocity: male and female roles are to be balanced, complementary; pleasure follows work well done. This is the ideal Anowa searches for but cannot find. She is the kind of Ghanaian woman with a vision of her place in society that no one can understand. She constantly questions priorities.

Many of the images of women at work are of women struggling to make ends meet. They are illiterate, rural, sometimes migrant urban women, monogamous, polygamous, divorced, or widows who

live somewhere at the subsistence level. There are invariably children to be supported and the husband, if he contributes anything, rarely contributes enough to ease the situation. Often men simply do not appear, perhaps because in a matrilineal family, the man is concerned with his sister's children more than with his own and may not even live with his wife. Or, as in Aidoo's stories, he is weak and not up to the responsibilities that must be borne.

An article in Africa Woman magazine on the traditional economic role of African women stresses that many women overwork themselves so that they age or die prematurely and never enjoy their children's success--the reason for their hard work in the first place. ³⁰

In "Something To Talk About on the Way to the Funeral " by Ama Ata Aidoo, two women have returned to their home village for the funeral of Auntie Araba. Her life has been one of hard work to support herself and a son born out of wedlock. The son is Ato, "the big scholar we hear of."³¹

Anyway, Auntie Araba's mother took her daughter in and treated her like an egg until the baby was born. And then did Auntie Araba tighten her girdle and get ready to work? Lord, there is no type of dough or flour they say she has not mixed and fried or baked. ... Hei, she went there and dashed here. But they say that somehow, she was not getting much from these efforts. Some people even say that they landed her in debts.

But I think someone should have told her that these things are good to eat but they suit more the tastes of the town-dwellers. ...

Like you know, my sister. This is what Auntie Araba discovered, but only after some time. I don't know who advised her to drop all those fancy foods. But she did, and finally started baking bread, ordinary bread. That turned out better for her.³²

(This is an interesting passage because it corresponds to a point made in the Africa Woman article referred to above.

"It is necessary that the energy of the home economist [i.e., the rural, self-supporting woman] is not dissipated in unproductive directions since the charge of tending the home and family and making money in between lies in her lap."³³ The author suggests that women like Auntie Araba need advice and direction in their home industries if they are to make the most of their efforts and capital.)

The two women continue: "They say she used to say that if she could never sleep her fill, it was because she wanted to give her son a good education."³⁴ Yet Ato was difficult and ungrateful. When he came home for holidays, "he left his mother with big debts to pay from his high living. Though I must add that she did not seem to mind."³⁵ Thus, the recurring image of the mother sacrificing herself for her children.

Another story of Aidoo provides an interesting contrast to the one we have just seen. "Other Versions" is told from the point of view of a young man, Kofi, who is being educated but who, unlike Ato in the preceding story, wants to help his mother financially. But in this case, it is considered proper that the money be given to the father, although it appears that his mother works hard without much profit and bears much of the family expense.

On a visit home, he gives her four pounds, the first money he has ever contributed:

... the moment the money fell into her hand she burst into tears.

"Ao, I too am coming to something in this world. Who would have thought it? ... Now I too have got my own man who will take care of me...." [My ital.] Yes, and after all this business she didn't take the silly money.

"Hand it over to your father. He will certainly buy a bottle of gin and pour some to the ancestors. Then I will ask him to give me about ten shillings to buy some yam and eggs for Sunday" ³⁶

Kofi is greatly disturbed that his mother will not get the money. She has always clothed and fed her children--her husband doesn't provide enough money--and she is just a poor market woman, not very successful. Even so, she always speaks of "building a house 'for you children'"³⁷ We are not told in this story that Kofi's father is polygamous, but such a man might well be. (Kofi's mother exclaims, "Now I too have got my own man") He may also have responsibilities to matrikin. Aidoo does tell us that is ungenerous.

In his introduction to Ama Ata Aidoo's collection of short stories, Ezekiel Mphahlele, a major African writer comments:

The men in Miss Aidoo's fiction are mere shadows or voices or just 'fillers.' Somewhere, quietly, they seem to be manipulating the woman's life or negatively controlling it or simply having a good time, knowing that they are assured of something like a divine top-dog position in life. Given this premise, the woman, without worrying about her traditional place, simply gets up on her feet and asserts not her importance in relation to the male, but her motherhood. Over the centuries as market towns were increased in size and numbers, she got tougher and more wily, astute and resourceful. She survived. And yet she maintained that delicate balance between a sense of independence and her feminine role in relation to the male's. This has come to characterize the African woman wherever social conditions make it imperative for her to leave her house to go and work.³⁸

Kofi's mother exemplifies the delicate balance Mphahlele refers to.

In a good size family where the work pressures are heavy, we find that the burden also falls on young children. They learn that if they want to eat, they must work. Often this even takes the form of a kind of child labor. Three Ghanaian short stories illustrate this situation in different ways.

In "The Late Bud" by Ama Ata Aidoo, one sees that helping with work is a way not only to eat but to receive affection. The story opens: " 'The good child who willingly goes on errands eats the food of peace.' This was a favourite saying in the house."³⁹ But, "Yaaba never stayed at home to go on an errand. Even when she was around, she never would fetch water to save a dying soul. How could she then eat the food of peace?"⁴⁰ In dishing out servings of food, Yaaba's mother would say, " 'Other people, ... who have not worked will not get the tiniest bit.' She then started eating hers. If Yaaba felt that the joke was being carried too far, she coughed. 'Oh,' the mother would cry out, 'people should be careful about their throats. Even if they coughed until they spat blood, none of this porridge would touch their mouths.' "⁴¹ It is only at the end of the story when Yaaba injures herself trying to get red clay for her mother who will use it to polish the floor of the house that she receives the affection from her mother that she had begun to seriously doubt.

In "Water's Edge" by Kwaku Adom-Ampofo, a young girl, Dankwaa, is sent by her parents to work for an elderly woman, Nana Kunkuma, to repay a debt. The old woman's first words to Dankwaa are:

What I greatly detest is laziness--and disobedience too. ... Every day, you have to get up early to sweep the yard , fetch water, wash kitchen utensils and dump house-hold rubbish. ... We will go to the farm tomorrow to fetch some fire-wood and foodstuffs....So you must get up early in the morning to do all your work before we go to the farm.⁴²

The next day, Dankwaa works hard from early morning while the other children of the household--Nana's grandchildren--watch her. "They had got a slave." She is fed last and never enough, and is not allowed to rest until the day is finished for her. When her mother visits her, they silently accept the old woman's complaints, for a "slave cannot be angry with his master." In other words, Dankwaa has no rights. At the end of the story, she is saved not by her mother or father but by a man who has seen her with Nana Kunkuma and wants to marry her. He is old enough to be her grandfather, but he is rich and her parents accept the offer, and Dankwaa again obeys her parents. Although the man she is to marry can offer her comforts, we cannot help but ask if this is the kind of freedom Dankwaa would choose.

The third story, "The Offal Kind," by Ayi Kwei Armah, concerns a young girl, Araba, who is sent by her mother to live with and work for a "lady" in a nearby town.

When she went away from her people she was still very young. She did not know the lady who came to take her away, but her mother knew her. They had sat taking all night about her. She was going to be the lady's household help, and if she was good and learned everything there was to learn, she would perhaps be a lady herself one day, perhaps.

They had had to walk the few miles to the road before they could get on a lorry She was used to walking; every day she had gone to the stream to fetch water for the family, and the stream was down farther than this road, in the other direction.⁴³

Araba has left hard work for harder work. As the days pass, she is given increasingly more work, increasingly less food. "And the less the lady gave her to eat, the more often she told her, 'Food costs money here. Don't waste it.' The girl would smile timidly, look down, and proceed with her work."⁴⁴ When she goes to market and sees the prosperous market women, she imagines herself one of them, and this becomes her dream. But in the meantime, "Work had drugged the girl, so that she did not have enough energy even to resent it"⁴⁵ As in the preceding story, when her mother comes to visit her, she cannot tell the truth. At the end of the story, Araba does the only thing she can do in the town to survive, if she is not to stay with the "lady." She moves into a house of prostitution. This is the one way, the others there indicate to her, that a girl like her can earn enough money to begin to trade.

Note that in two of these three stories, there is no father figure or significant man in the family. Dankwaa's father, Poku, is a poor man, a palm-wine tapper, "the most despised occupation." In the other two stories, the mother imposes on the daughter the hardship of work or she punishes her for not working enough. These girls' lives are dominated by work from an early age, as are the lives of their mothers,

and in the last case, even prostitution is an accepted form of work. Indeed, it is welcome for the relative advantages it offers. Kenneth Little writes that women often "prefer destitution to employment that they regard as derogatory."⁴⁶

In Aidoo's story "In the Cutting of a Drink," a young man goes to Accra in search of his sister who has not been home for twelve years. His mother had taken her to this woman who promised to teach her to keep house and to work with the sewing machine ... and she came home the first Christmas after the woman took her but has never been home again, these twelve years."⁴⁷ He discovers that his sister Mansa has become a prostitute. When he meets her:

'Young woman, is this the work you do?' I asked her.
'Young man, what work do you mean?' she too asked me. I laughed.
'Do you not know what work?' I asked again.
'And who are you to ask me such questions? I say, who are you? Let me tell you that any kind of work is work. You villager, you villager, who are you?' she screamed.⁴⁸

In his excellent study, African Women in Towns, Little provides a detailed discussion of "walk-about women." He mentions that researchers have found a "strong resistance to female migration [to towns] in Ghana,"⁴⁹ for fear of the migrant women becoming prostitutes. This is illustrated in the story above.

It can be seen from the examples provided that most Ghanaian women engage in selling and trading something, if not foodstuffs then cloth or other hard goods. But the market women of Accra, particularly of the Makola market, are notoriously successful and remain the ideal of most other

trading women. Thus, they are thought of as "Merchant Princesses." Many of these women have "credits of thousands of pounds sterling with overseas firms and act as intermediaries to women retailers."⁵⁰ Esther Ocloo, owner of Nkulenu Industries, a food packaging concern is a prime example of the successful market/business woman. Just as Kofi's mother in "Other Versions" wanted to build her children a house, these market women do build elaborate European-styled homes for their families and send their sons to English universities. Moreover, they are protected by their own self-help organizations, such as "Nanemei Akpee" (Society of Friends) in Ghana. Through membership and by means of contributions, individual women receive in turn cash advances to be used as capital in their businesses. In time of crisis, they can obtain aid by making their need known.⁵¹ It is a system of mutual support and solidarity and an organization by and for women only.

In The Ashanti Doll, the life of Ghana's market women is portrayed through a young girl, Edna, and her very successful grandmother, "Mom." Like Anna Dodoo, current President of the Market Women's Association of Ghana, Mom is uneducated. Edna, however, thinks education is important. Mom disagrees and has taken Edna out of school: "You have to take my place here, child of my heart, that's essential. I thought you had understood that long ago. You know, to be a market woman is important. She is a person who has a real part to play in the life of the country. She is the backbone of the country, child of my heart."⁵² (It is not unusual for a young girl to follow in

her grandmother's footsteps. In an interview with Anna Dodoo in Africa Woman, she talks of her granddaughter's joining her in business.)⁵³

Mom is admired by the other market women for discouraging Edna's education and thereby ensuring her career in the market. The real dilemma comes, however, when Edna meets a man whom she wants to marry. Her grandmother wants her to keep her place in the market because she worked "to make sure of that place" for her and because a man cannot be relied upon. Although Edna admires Mom's dedication to work and values continuity from generation to generation, she sees herself as the "new-style African woman," for whom work must be combined with a meaningful marriage. There is a "conflict between new and old ways."

Recall that Aidoo's Anowa also wanted to join her husband in meaningful work. This is very much the thrust in Ghanaian journalistic literature of the last several years, especially following IWY. Articles celebrate the working woman, expressing her awareness of the work to be done, especially in bringing the rural woman more effectively into the development process.

A film entitled "Fear Woman" produced by the United Nations emphasizes the initiative and independence of Ghanaian women. In the film, Annie Jiagge, A Supreme Court Judge and jurist of international repute, Esther Ocloo, mentioned above, and Nana Okosampa VI, a village chief, all express the unique and powerful roles of women as leaders in many aspects of Ghanaian society. Their roles are neither superior nor inferior to those of men, but complementary, says Annie Jiagge.⁵⁴

The images of women and work in the imaginative literature reveal the devotion that binds the woman to her work because of its highly social nature. The working woman must be thought of in the context of her interpersonal relations. She is the mother working, the wife, grandmother, sister, daughter, niece, and kinswoman working. These relationships both determine and are in turn moulded by the work she does, her relationship to it. And the nature of these relationships must be seen in all the complexities of African culture, or cultures, which determine, say, what a mother-daughter relationship is all about.

One last literary example to illustrate the changes taking place in Ghana regarding women and work. In a short story entitled "Asemka" by Armah, an old woman muses about work and the man who rents a room in her house:

These things are known and felt by everyone; a man must never cook his own food. A man should not wash his own clothes. He must ask a woman or a boy to do these things. Mr. Ainoo [who cleans his own room] does not live like a man. He is strange.⁵⁵

In contrast, an article titled "Why Men in Home Science?" appeared in Ideal Woman in August 1975.⁵⁶ We read here of a reconsideration of male/female work roles and the enrollment of men in home science courses at the University of Ghana. Thus, the old and the new.

II. QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD: THE VALUE OF CHILDREN

It is appropriate at the end of the section on women and work and at the beginning of this section to link the two. Why do African women have so many children? One of the most frequently heard explanations, which pertains to women in all developing countries, is that children are needed in the labor force, in the fields beside their mothers, or to take mother's place at home with smaller children. Another explanation is the high child mortality rate in these countries. Both are accurate explanations, and we have seen in the preceding section that children who do not share in the work load do not eat.

But we would like to go further and examine the psychological and social value placed by women themselves and by the society at large on childbearing, a value which must first be seen in terms of the African worldview.

By "worldview" we mean, briefly, the passage of time and man's place and role in it. To the African, time is a rhythmic, unbroken continuum, consisting of the unborn, the living and the dead. The presence of the unborn is intensely felt, and the dead, the ancestors, are believed to continue in another form. Thus death, while awesome and sorrowful, is not as final to the African as to the westerner. It is linked with birth, which because of its intimate alliance with death, is revered. Hence the mother is revered; as she alone can bring forth children, "she alone can ensure the continuity of the clan." 57

This is the source of the woman's unique position of power in the society, and it is simply axiomatic that a woman will be a mother--of many children. If she is not, she has failed, not only as a wife and daughter, but as a kinswoman.

In a novel entitled A Woman in Her Prime by Asare Konadu, Pokuwaa, the novel's main character, is a woman who cannot conceive. She is married to her third husband, who fears she will divorce him if she does not have their child, and she performs fertility rites faithfully as the priest instructs her. Although her barrenness is a private matter, public prayers are offered to the ancestors on holy days, and thus it becomes, on another level, a community concern. The novel is almost entirely about the anguish of a childless woman, and the criticism and negative reactions from family and the larger social group with which she must cope. Very often, she is met by hostility and rejection rather than by compassion from those around her, or by a disturbing combination of both. Fortunately, Pokuwaa's husband Kwado, her third, loves her very much and is a source of much comfort to her. But one assumes that this is far from the case in most traditional African marriages.

Pokuwaa's village, Brenhoma, is a very traditional one in which "time was counted by the sun." As the novel opens, Pokuwaa is preparing to join in the sacrifice to the god Tano:

On her way ... she had been busy with her prayerful thoughts, beseeching her ancestors and the gods to bless her efforts to get a child The ancestors of her father and mother would surely help her. If she herself had wronged anyone or if the sins of her parents or ancestors were being avenged on her, the deities could be besought to spare her the pain of not having a child of her own.⁵⁸

It can be seen that the possibility of there being a sin as the cause of her barrenness, a sin she cannot even identify, which may not even have been her own, places an overwhelming burden on Pokuwaa, causing her to take on a kind of collective guilt.

She recalls the first several years of her marriage. No pregnancy. "She remembered that this had made her heart afraid because of the people of Brenhoma. To them, to be barren was the worst that could happen to a woman."⁵⁹ And when the children of the village come to her, as they frequently did because "there was something between Pokuwaa and children," their mothers would scold them and take them away. Hurt on one such occasion, Pokuwaa said to the mother, "Don't ever think I shall do harm to your child."⁶⁰

Because barrenness is perceived as being caused by some ignoble lack or fault on the part of the woman, or the man, it is repleat with meaning, the mystery of which causes it to be doubly awesome. This perception is similar to the one that some diseases, like cancer, indicate a deficiency in the victim's moral character.⁶¹ Thus, the attitude of the villagers toward Pokuwaa is one of fear and withdrawal, as if she were diseased.

Aidoo's Anowa is barren too and is regarded with a mixture of fear and loathing by an old woman of her parental village:

I wonder what a woman eats to produce a child like Anowa. I am sure that such children are not begotten by normal processes Ah! They issue from cancerous growths, tumours that grow from evil dreams. Yes, and from hard and bony material that the tender organs of ordinary human women are too weak to digest. [My ital.]⁶²

Even Kofi Ako, Anowa's husband, thinks her ill: "I used to like you very much. I wish I could rid you of what ails you, so I could give you peace It is an illness, Anowa. An illness that turns to bile all the good things of here-under-the-sun."⁶³ And Anowa's father asks her mother: "Barrenness is not such a common affliction in your family, is it?"⁶⁴ So, a woman in whose womb a child does not grow is spoken of as being the issue of a cancerous growth: Both barrenness and cancer are mysterious, uncontrollable phenomena.

Much of the fear and anguish attached to being childless is related to the break in continuity referred to above. A woman without a child will have no one to help her in her old age and no one to bury her. In a sense, she will be no one's ancestor--unthinkable for the African.

She [Pokuwaa] was weeping now, seized with the fear that if she ... lost this chance of bearing a child, her fate as a barren woman would be made certain. Then her old age would be doomed to loneliness; no child to care for her, no grandchild to warm her compound and no issue of her blood at all to mourn at her death.⁶⁵

Similarly, at one point, Anowa says to her husband, "... when I throw my eyes into the future, I do not see myself there." He answers: "This is because you have no children. Women who have children can always see themselves in the future."⁶⁶

Relatedly, continuity is a concern of the barren woman's mother, the disappointed grandmother. Pokuwaa's mother says, "You see, my child, you should have children. You are my only daughter, and unless you have a child our lives will end miserably My five sons will have children for their wives' families, but the child that you will bear will be my own grandchild."⁶⁷ Pokuwaa's mother goes so far as to provoke a divorce between her daughter and the husband who does not father a child.

Anowa's mother also expresses the desire for grandchildren so that the family will continue. Both Anowa's and Pokuwaa's families are matrilineal Akans, so their mothers are particularly anxious that they bear children.

In both A Woman in Her Prime and Anowa, the barren woman is likened to a man. When Pokuwaa tells her mother that she will not continue making the fertility sacrifices because she considers the effort futile, her mother replies: "If she is not going to do what is necessary, then I must take it out of my mind that I have a daughter. She is like any boy in Brenhoma, for there is no difference between a barren woman and a man."⁶⁸

Similarly, Kofi Ako tells Anowa, "You ought to have been born a man."⁶⁹ One can see to what extent womanhood and motherhood are synonymous in the African view of life.

We see instances in literature where the woman perceives motherhood as a mixed blessing. These are very poor women who,

although they cannot conceive of an alternative, are well aware of the burden they carry as mothers. In "A Gift From Somewhere " by Aidoo, a young Moslem woman believes that her only child has died, like the two before him. She thinks:

Should any of my friends hear me moaning, they will say I am behaving like one who has not lost a baby before....Now all I must do is to try and prepare myself for another pregnancy, for it seems this is the reason why I was created ... to be pregnant for nine of the twelve months of every year ... Or is there a way out of it all? And where does this road lie? I shall have to get used to it....It is the pattern set for my life. 70

In Armah's novel Fragments, a mother rushes out into the street to find that her small boy has nearly been killed by a truck. The driver reproves her harshly, but she is so overwhelmed by the narrow escape of her child that she can feel only an enormous closeness to the boy.

Insult me, Owura, ... So long as I have his little life, insult me. There is hope 'This life,' she had said, looking down from the sky at her child with the tears falling more slowly, shaking her head. This life. All the woman knew. A long stretch of danger with both ends unknown, the only certain things being the constant threat and the presence of loss on a way lined with infrequent, brief, unlikely hopes.... 71

The last point to be made about childbearing is that often it is regarded as even more important than the marriage itself; or, a child binds a marriage in a way otherwise impossible. In A Woman In Her Prime, one of Pokuwaa's friends wants to divorce her husband because she suspects that he is sleeping with and thinking of marrying another woman in the village. When Pokuwaa advises patience, Koramoa

replies: "I have tried patience for too long First it was for a child. Now I have a child and I am not happy. I shall leave him."⁷²

In a short story entitled "I Want a Child" that appeared in Ideal Woman,⁷³ a popular women's magazine published in Accra, a young woman conceives a child in the absence of her husband with the friend of the husband in whose care she had been left. She does this because during ten years of married life she had remained childless. She could no longer tolerate barrenness and is portrayed as having reached the breaking point.

In an essay entitled "The Problem of Feminine Masochism," Karen Horney, one of the members of the early group around Freud and who later made original contributions toward thinking about women in society, wrote that masochism might appear in a woman if the following factors were present: "Restriction in the number of children, inasmuch as having and rearing children supplies the woman with various gratifying outlets (tenderness, achievement, self-esteem), and this becomes all the more important when having and rearing children is the measuring rod of social evaluation."⁷⁴ [My ital.]

Horney wrote this essay in 1935 and she was interested in thinking about women in a cross-cultural way. The point is that a woman not inclined to be masochistic, or self-depriving, would not be inclined to restrict her childbearing capacity if she were part of a culture that valued her in strict relation

to the fulfillment of that capacity. As we have seen in the literature, the refusal to bear children, or disinterest in bearing them (Anowa), and of course the inability to bear them (Pokuwaa), is regarded in the traditional culture as an illness--mental as well as physical. The society recognizes no alternatives for a woman's self-fulfillment and punishes the woman who is childless. In addition, the woman who cannot bear children will suffer from frustration that may lead to "neurotic" behavior. Thus, because of the value of children in African culture and because of the equation of womanhood with motherhood, the childless African woman will have to struggle to maintain her self-esteem. Only when she clearly understands and accepts alternatives for self-fulfillment will she freely choose to limit the number of children she bears.

III. THE WOMAN SOLE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD; POLYGAMY

The concept "sole head of household" must be examined in the light of traditional African family structures. The notion of the woman "sole head" implies that there is a mother and children but no husband/father where there should be and that the father roles have devolved onto the mother who is greatly burdened by them. In other words, it implies the absence of a major family figure (from a nuclear unit) with no substitute available.

However, traditional matrilineal Akan family structure bears no resemblance to the western nuclear family. In the traditional Akan family, the group occupying a household, or several households functioning more or less collectively in a compound, consists of three or four generations, the adult woman's grandmother or mother being the lineage head, her maternal great uncle, maternal uncle, or brother being the functional head; the rest of the group is made up of uterine siblings and sisters' children. Christine Opong writes of the support such a system offers:

In the relatively stable towns and villages the majority of the population has traditionally tended to live in households inhabited by matrilineage segments....This domestic residential pattern, whereby several female matrikin generally co-reside, facilitates the assistance of one by another and sharing of household chores and child-minding....matrilineage membership, with its attached permanent rights in the use of land and houses, provides enduring security for women and their children.⁷⁵

The question presents itself: If a woman does not live with her husband--she may be unmarried--but with her children in a network of supportive kinship relationships, should we think of her as a sole head of household? The key word is "supportive."

However, a supportive kinship arrangement is the ideal. A woman may have no male support whatever and no reliable female kin. She may form temporary unions with men who offer some support--especially in the towns. She may engage in prostitution, sometimes regarded as a socially acceptable form of support.⁷⁶

In short, the possibilities of the makeup of the African household are multiple. Furthermore, any one household may periodically change its form due to population mobility in West Africa today, the attraction of the cities and towns, and subsequent erosion of traditional family forms. Some women of the middle class are very attracted to a life of independence, free from the demands of a man and from the often constricting demands of kin. Kenneth Little maintains that this thirst for independence is a very strong force in the life of the West African woman today and that, although it is mainly an urban phenomenon, it is significantly transmitted to rural women, prompting many to leave their villages.⁷⁷

In the imaginative literature surveyed for this study, the images of women who are sole heads of households predominantly reveal the terrible loneliness and fear such women suffer. In a culture where collectivity is so essential,

they are portrayed as living lives of the greatest pathos. They are terribly poor, but worse, they are terribly alone. They are usually rural women, growing their own food, maintaining some animals, and selling what they can at market.

A short story entitled "Just To Buy Corn" by Kofi Awoonor, one of Africa's most important writers, is perhaps the most moving piece about a woman sole household head. She has been a widow for six months and thinks of her husband often, for she loved him greatly. He had been a farmer and raised corn. But one night he died suddenly with an "ache in his head." The mourners consumed the harvest's corn. And then her child became ill. "The child was coughing again. He coughed long dry coughs, from his little chest, and cried a little."⁷⁸ The illness seems to be tuberculosis, and it is implied that both child and mother are suffering from malnutrition. The woman uses herbs and fetishes against her child's illness; when a customer at market suggests that she take him to the hospital, she dismisses it because it is too expensive. Fetish religion is all she knows and is a strong force in her life: "The herbalist said his medicine would cure the child. She had paid several shillings and seven pence, eight markets' savings, and a white fowl for which she had not yet paid."⁷⁹

As ill as the child is, the woman must go to market to sell the mats she has woven and the child must go with her; "I owe money to the soap seller, and to the old lady Agbodo for fish. I also need corn."⁸⁰ She picks the child up from

the mat in their small hut, washes his face with water left overnight in a calabash and tries to nurse him. But she has little milk left, as she is undernourished, and the child refuses solid food. She speaks to him:

'Eh, my lord and little master, you coughed and coughed again last night. I am going to market again today, will you go?' The child made no reply because he was only eight months old. 'Ah, you will go. I will buy a shoe for you and the horse we saw in the big shop Then my lord and little master will ride a horse, gidiga, gidiga, gidiga, eh?' ... She dressed the child, and just as she lifted him to strap him on her back he started coughing again; long dry coughs which pierced through the mother's heart, and brought tears into the child's eyes.⁸¹

With the dying child strapped to her back and a load of mats on her head, she sets off for the lagoon for the boat ride to market. It is before six a.m. and she has had no breakfast. She seems more concerned about whether the ducks will have any food during her absence. If she sells all her mats at market, she muses, "I will spend sixpence for food; then the child will eat, and I will eat, and the ducks will eat till the next market day."⁸² The other women on the way to market can see that the baby is dying, but "they did not say their hidden thoughts. But the woman knew what was in their minds. Her heart missed a beat."⁸³

At market, the woman takes a place in the open--she cannot afford a stall--and by sunset has sold only some of her mats and at reduced prices, as customers have bargained her down. The child sleeps, coughs, and cries, looking at his mother "as if to say something." Finally, just as she is about to pack up to leave the market:

... a sudden strong spasm of coughing seized him
Then the child gave a violent start and twitched, the
white of his eyes showing, and he became cold and listless.
The woman knew it was over. The child was dead.
Should she scream? Should she shout for help?
She did not know what to do. The dead child lay
in her lap as she looked around, choking with fear
and horror. A man was asking for the price of a mat.⁸⁴

The sense of the woman's terror, her blind faith in fetishes, her all-consuming maternal love and self-sacrifice are overwhelming in this story. At the end she tells those who ask after the child that he is sleeping, that he behaved well at market and ate his food, and that she sold enough mats "just to be able to buy corn." She has literally swallowed her terror because she has no choice if she is to survive.

In "Certain Winds From the South " by Ama Ata Aidoo, a man is forced to leave his wife, child, and mother-in-law to find work in the south. As the woman in the story above, M'ma Asana, the elder woman, misses her husband greatly-- he left her as a soldier before her child was born and died when the newborn was only three days old.

When the old woman tries to hold back her son-in-law, he answers:

'But M'ma, what will be the use in my staying here and watching them starve? You yourself know that all the cola went bad, and even if they had not, with trade as it is, how much money do you think I would have got from them? And that is why I am going. Trade is broken and since we do not know when things will be good again, I think it will be better for me to go away.'⁸⁵

Fearing he may never return, M'ma Asana thinks, "... how is it we cannot hold our men? Allah, how is it?"⁸⁶ She thinks there must be something wrong with the women of her family. The story ends with M'ma Asana taking responsibility for her daughter and infant grandson; she speaks to her daughter:

I am going to the market now. Get up early to wash Fuseni. I hope to get something for those miserable colas. There is enough rice to make two, is there not? Good. Today even if it takes all the money, I hope to get us some smoked fish, the biggest I can find, to make us a real good sauce.⁸⁷

As in Kofi Awoonor's story, the impression created is of a woman who can barely make ends meet, but who faces each day with enormous courage and perseverance. The presence of a child, even if he is a burden, and how could he not be, is regarded as a blessing and brings joy into the life of the woman--mother and grandmother--which would otherwise be meaningless.

In a short story entitled "Holding Out" by E. Ofori Akyea, we see how children assume the burden in a household where there is no male support. Kofi, aged seventeen, is late for school, has had no breakfast, and has been up since before five in the morning performing household chores. His mother is chronically ill and his father, who works "as some kind of labourer" and rarely appears at home, drinks heavily and contributes nothing. There are four other children. His younger sister Yawa helps by working; she does poorly in school and will probably leave school in order to help support her family.

At seventeen he [Kofi] was being made to carry the burden of a father. He already worked part-time and wondered how much longer he could lead this sort of life. ... He had heard the mother telling the doctor one day, 'Take away any of my children and I don't know what will happen.'⁸⁸

Kofi's relatives are of no help at all. (In the other two stories there were no supportive kin either.)

In Ama Ata Aidoo's "Something To Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," two women have children by men who do not marry them. In one case, the mother of the pregnant woman takes her in during the pregnancy; in the other, the young woman leaves her child with her mother when she goes off to the town to work. In "Water's Edge," discussed above, Nana Kunkuma is head of a household consisting of her two daughters, three granddaughters, and three grandsons. She works two farms--the others appear to work little, if at all--prepares food, etc. In both stories, we find the common grandmother household head.

Thus, as portrayed in the literature, being a sole household head is not a source of independence for the woman but of enormous stress and often destitution, especially when she lacks any form of kin support.

Polygamy

The controversy over polygamy vs. monogomy is represented by two articles that appeared in Africa Woman in 1976. The first, entitled "Monogamy: Is It Really So Christian?"⁸⁹ argues that polygamy is a "culturally determined" form of marriage which cannot be done away with without a serious breakdown of family and social structure. This in fact, the article says, has been the result of the pressure exerted by Christian churches in Africa to suppress polygamy. Wives who were "sent away" have lost marital rights, social status, economic security, and sometimes their children. Some have turned to prostitution. Because the African concept of marriage, unlike the Western concept, is based on the "preservation and continuation of the family," marriage is ratified, not "through mutually fulfilling inter-personal relationships, nor through sexual intercourse, but only through the birth of a child."⁹⁰ This emphasis on fertility supports polygamy.

The second article, entitled simply "Polygamy,"⁹¹ argues that the conditions that created polygamy as a social form, namely the economic need to have many hands to work the land, are changing and that polygamy is rapidly becoming outmoded. Further, the author says, polygamy has been "an instrument of social inequality, ... of conflict in many polygamous households, and has given more freedom to men than to women."⁹² While the first author argues that polygamy "will not disappear for some time to come, " the second writer emphasizes the increase of monogamous marriages and the disfavour into which polygamy

has fallen. He predicts that both monogamy and polygamy are fast becoming outmoded forms and that marriage in the future will be a combination of the two, providing women with the mobility and independence they are demanding.

In a short piece in Ideal Woman, Accra, November 1975, the author (name not mentioned) gives her impressions of a seminar conducted by the National Council on Women and Development of Ghana:

On the question of polygamy, the consensus of opinion was that it is not an imposition by the men but rather a manifestation of the weakness of women. "If only women would resolve never to enter into a polygamous marriage, polygamy would die a natural death," they argued. So the ball was left in the courts of the women!!⁹³

We must remember that both Africa Woman and Ideal Woman are published in English and thus read by literate, usually city women. We might well ask whether the majority of African women--the rural women--are in any position, psychologically or economically, to "resolve never to enter into a polygamous marriage." The point is that the level of awareness represented and taken for granted in their editorial content is a level unknown to the typical rural woman. We hypothesize that the editorial content represents the ideal to which, once the rural woman leaves her village, she will probably begin to aspire.

In the Ghanaian novels and short stories read for this study, the polygamous woman is invariably in a most stressful position, doing without her husband's attention or presence, often poor and without sufficient means, the object of jealousy and

hurtful competition from the co-wives, their kin, their children. When a young girl must live in the same household with her father's second wife, not her mother, there is great tension between the two. In all, the literary images tend to give more credence to the article criticizing polygamy for the inequality it creates and from which the women suffer. While the husbands may show some discomfort in the tense situations between wives, they are clearly in positions of power, and at the price of their wives' submission.

In a short drama entitled "Mother's Tears," by Kwaw Ansah, two wives, living in the same house, quarrel ceaselessly, as persons without any rights whatsoever. They are set against each other by the interdependence that has rather insidiously grown between them. Ampona, their husband, is a "not-well-to-do but striving to live man." Araba, the older wife, is up early in the morning to feed the chickens, sweep the yard, carry firewood, fetch water. As she works, she complains aloud, "If they'd ever pause to think that I'm no donkey ... As though I were the servant of the house."⁹⁴ Adoma enters and accuses Araba of always complaining. She tells her to complain to her husband if she is unhappy. Araba says she has, but "my tears have been received with laughter."⁹⁵ Adoma responds, "With our stone-headed husband, I could only suggest that you endeavour to shed some tears of blood to win his sympathy."⁹⁶ Araba reproaches her for her disrespect, and Adoma reminds the other that she is not her mother, and so they argue, Adoma calling Araba a witch.

When Ampona hears the quarrelling, he warns Araba,
" ... you'll either curtail such jealous attitudes and be content or search for a more comfortable home elsewhere-- I'm becoming deaf with your chattering."⁹⁷ He speaks to his second wife just as harshly. At the end of the drama, Araba thinks about life as if she has been played a mean joke.
" ... but I'll some day rest with death. Oh yes"⁹⁸

In Konadu's Ordained by the Oracle, Boateng's first wife has just died and it is suggested that his recently married second wife had "bound Mrs. Boateng's soul." At the same time, rumour has it that his first wife had tried to prevent the second marriage by using witchcraft on him: she had "put juju into my food which had made me a slave to her."⁹⁹ Here, the animosity between co-wives is represented by the superstitious fear of one woman binding the other's soul and by the eldest using witchcraft on her husband.

One last word about the literary images of women with respect to marriage in general in Ghana. Time and again the importance of the parents' role in choosing a bride or a husband is emphasized. In "Abena and the Python," one of the Ananse tales, a beautiful young girl, Abena, is the object of the love of all the young men in the area. But she is proud-- she knows her beauty means power--and she scorns each of her lovers, to the great distress of her mother who asks her who she is to be so "high and mighty." Finally, after many suitors have been rejected by Abena, a large python, disguised as a handsome prince, comes to the village and woos and wins Abena. But once he has her on the way to their new "home"--

his subterranean hole in the swamp--he reveals his true identity and Abena is devastated. Her plight worsens before it improves, and at the end of the tale, she, safe again in her parental village, expresses the moral, "Listen when mother speaks, For Mother knows all."¹⁰⁰

In Efua Sutherland's play, Foriwa, the Queen Mother presses her daughter, who is educated as well as lovely, to marry: "Every woman's lot is marriage."¹⁰¹ The mother has a rich, elderly man in mind for her daughter, but Foriwa refuses to marry him and questions the value of marriage at all. She sees her friends languishing in their newly formed marriages. And of course, in Anowa, Ama Ata Aidoo creates the image of a woman who not only freely chooses a husband against the wishes of her mother, but pursues a most untraditional married life. The reality in Ghana, according to Kenneth Little, is that women are actively seeking lives of independence, that they are seeking new kinds of relationships with men--married and unmarried--in which their status as women will no longer be only "ascribed" but "achieved."¹⁰² He of course is referring to the women in towns, many of them newly arrived from rural areas.

In an article in Africa Woman entitled "High Cost of Brides" by Rufus Darpo,¹⁰³ the point is made that the traditional bride price has become a prohibitive factor in marriages so that the young men are "scared away," and the girls are flooding the cities to engage in prostitution. If they cannot find a husband at home because their parents are asking too high a price for them, then city life offers the possibility of

finding a man, but it also imposes a financial burden on such women--thus prostitution. Often these women must send cash and material goods home to their rural parents.

Thus in Ghana today there is a struggle to live up to the traditional ideal of marriage while responding to the economic changes that threaten that ideal. The images of women in Ghanaian imaginative literature reflect the conflicting social and economic pressures with which they must cope in order to survive.

IV. NUTRITION AND HEALTH

The recent journalistic literature published about Ghana reflects the effort to educate increasing numbers of women to the importance of nutritious diets and sound health habits. Mobile health units and public health officials who travel from village to village are the principle means in rural areas of exposing mothers to new ways of caring for themselves and their families and the new values implicit in such new ways. In a short film entitled "D'Octrefo Nyo," produced by UNICEF, we see lessons being given in the dialect by a visiting nurse to the women of the village. The nurse's manner is easy; she is familiar, not only with the people's language but with their customs and the circumstances of their lives. The women look on, some quite intrigued, some seemingly uninterested, others with a mixture of disapproval and awe. One can see on the faces of these women that new methods of child care, for example, while simply a matter of mechanics to the westerner, might be quite revolutionary to their lives.

An article entitled "Bringing up your Baby" in Africa Woman stresses the importance of a mother's regular consultations with a doctor or with the mobile medical unit in rural areas to receive inoculations against endemic diseases which in the past have been the cause of high infant mortality, to learn methods of nutrition, and generally grow in awareness of sound health measures.¹⁰⁴

One of the more controversial issues is that of breast feeding vs. bottle feeding. Several pieces in Africa Woman

and in Ideal Woman stress the superiority of breast feeding and warn mothers not to be taken in by the "sophisticated" western way--the bottle.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, women are reminded of the wholesomeness of Ghanaian grown produce and urged to use it instead of imported goods; cassava instead of wheat bread, for example. Women are taught effective ways of conserving nutritious, home-grown vegetables.

Other articles tell of the widespread horror of malnutrition and diseases such as Xerophthalmia blindness caused by a vitamin A deficiency.¹⁰⁶ In these cases, good food is often simply not available because of drought, because of eroded land, because of too many mouths to feed.

It is more often than not this latter image of women and nutrition that is found in the imaginative literature. In a poem entitled "The Only Soup," it is put clearly:

Aroma from the pots of three busy mothers
in the dusking trees
floated over the forest air
binding the sharp desires of twenty kiddies
.....
The dusking evening
veiling the restless hands
and tireless feet
of mothers three
abusy with the only soup
of the day 107

Similarly, in "Just To Buy Corn" the mother is feeding herself and her ill child with a little corn, some fish, and the water left overnight in a calabash which may well have become polluted. Both are in states of malnutrition, and the mother is probably also diseased. She no longer has milk

for her child as the mother in "Certain Winds From the South." In that story, a husband must go south for work because "he cannot afford even goat flesh for his wife in maternity."

A common image is that of the woman and her children eating after her husband and other adult males have eaten their fill. (This is true throughout West Africa and occurs in the Caribbean too, as will be mentioned later.) In Aidoo's "In the Cutting of a Drink," a young village man is amazed that in the city, "a woman prepares a meal for a man and eats it with him. Yes, they do so often," he says.¹⁰⁸

Another factor that seems to effectively work against sound nutrition and health habits is the religious taboo and the authority of the Moslem or fetish priest. When combined with poverty, the effect can be disastrous. In "Just to Buy Corn," as seen above, the mother will not take her child to a hospital--it is too expensive, she says--but she indebts herself to the fetish priest in order to secure his remedy. His advice is the use of "herbs wrapped in a piece of blue cloth on which was tied the jaw bone of a chameleon. She rubbed this on the child's chest, seven times...." ¹⁰⁹ This is the treatment for tuberculosis.

In Aidoo's "A Gift from Somewhere," a Moslem mother and sick child are visited by the Mallam. They are poor as is the Mallam who expects to be paid for his "consultations." He can see that the child is dying but will not acknowledge it for fear of losing his credibility:

Allah, the child is breathing but what kind of breath is this? I must hurry up and leave. Ah ... what a bad day this is. But I will surely not want the baby to grow still in my arms! ... for that will be bad luck, big bad luck ... I am so hungry now. I thought at least I was going to earn some four pennies so I could eat. ... Now look--And I can almost count its ribs! ... Now I must think up something quickly to comfort the mother with.¹¹⁰

And the woman, in turn, thinks, "Who does the Mallam think he is deceiving?" as he assures her that the child will recover beautifully. But he advises her to observe food taboos: "Yourself you must not eat meat. You must not eat fish from the sea, Friday, Sunday. You hear?" And the child, "If he is about ten, tell him he must not eat meat and fish from the sea, Friday, Sunday." And then the Mallam spits on the child, on his forehead and stomach, and massages the child very hard. "You would have thought the child's skin would peel off any time. And the woman could not bear to look on." However, the child recovers, the woman thanks the Mallam in her heart, and she continues for years to observe his prescribed food taboos, though she will not include her son in the taboo observance. "How can a schoolboy, and who knows, one day he may become a real scholar, how can he go through life dragging this type of taboo along with him?" But, "I myself will go on observing it until I die." ¹¹¹

Thus in the literature, we see that religious taboos, dire poverty, and traditional behavioral patterns (i.e., the women and children eating after the men) act as obstacles to balanced diets, sufficient calorie, protein and vitamin intake as well as to sound sanitary and medical measures.

Footnotes

¹Christine Oppong, Marriage Among A Matrilineal Elite: A Family Study of Ghanaian Senior Civil Servants (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 28.

²Oppong, p. 29.

³Ibid, pp. 30, 31, 32.

⁴Ashanti Proverbs, trans., R.S. Rattray (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1916), pp. 38, 125, 127.

⁵Ibid, p. 42.

⁶Kenneth Little, African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 6-7.

⁷Oppong, pp. 32-3.

⁸Ibid, p. 49.

⁹Ama Ata Aidoo, "For Whom Things Did Not Change," No Sweetness Here (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 29.

¹⁰Peggy Appiah, "How Kwaku Ananse was punished for his Bad Manners," Tales of an Ashanti Father (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1967). (Kwaku Ananse is a mythological spider character very popular in the Ashanti folktale. His acts represent human virtues, vices and their consequences, thus serving as a moral lesson.), pp. 20-24.

¹¹Asare Konadu, Ordained by the Oracle (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), p. 40.

¹²Ibid, p. 43.

¹³Robert Sutherland Rattray, The Leopard Priestess (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1934), pp. 48-9.

¹⁴Peggy Appiah, "How Death came to Mankind," Tales of an Ashanti Father (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1967), p. 141.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 143.

¹⁶Aidoo, p. 75.

¹⁷Little, p. 169.

¹⁸Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), p. 15.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 16.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid, pp. 16, 17.

²²Ibid, p. 17.

²³Ibid, p. 18.

²⁴Ibid, p. 23.

²⁵Ibid, p. 27.

²⁶Ama Ata Aidoo, Anowa (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1970), p. 18.

²⁷Ibid, p. 24.

²⁸Ibid, p. 27.

²⁹Ibid, pp. 34, 35.

³⁰Aina Lewis, "The Traditional, Economic Role of the African Woman," Africa Woman, No. 7 (November/December, 1976), p. 65.

³¹Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 144.

³²Ibid, pp. 144-45.

³³Lewis, p. 65.

³⁴Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 146.

³⁵Ibid, p. 147.

- ³⁶Ibid, p. 159.
- ³⁷Ibid, p. 163.
- ³⁸Ibid, p. xx.
- ³⁹Ibid, p. 127.
- ⁴⁰Ibid, p. 128.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²Kwaku Adom-Ampofo, "Water's Edge," Okyeame, Vol. 4, No. 2. (June 1969), p. 114.
- ⁴³Ayi Kwei Armah, "The Offal Kind," Harper's Magazine, Vol. 238 (January 1969), p. 79.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Ibid, p. 80.
- ⁴⁶Little, p. 39.
- ⁴⁷Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 37.
- ⁴⁸Ibid, p. 43.
- ⁴⁹Little, p. 83
- ⁵⁰Ibid, p. 44.
- ⁵¹Ibid, p. 52.
- ⁵²Francis Bebey, The Ashanti Doll, trans. Joyce A. Hutchinson (Westport: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1977), p. 20.
- ⁵³"Anna Dodoo: President of the Market Women's Association of Ghana talks to Africa Woman," Africa Woman, No. 5 (July/August 1976), p. 23.
- ⁵⁴"Fear Woman," United Nations.

⁵⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, "Asemka," Okyeame, Vol. 3, No. 1 (December 1966), p. 28.

⁵⁶"Why Men in Home Science? Asks Dr. Lila E. Engberg," Ideal Woman, Vol. 5, No. 1 (August 1975), pp. 16, 30.

⁵⁷Joy Zollner, "Women's Rights in Africa and the United States," Africa Report, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January-February 1977), p. 8.

⁵⁸Asare Konadu, A Woman in Her Prime (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1967), pp. 3, 4.

⁵⁹Ibid, p. 23.

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 24.

⁶¹I am indebted in part for this insight to Susan Sontag's brilliant three-part essay on disease recently published in the New York Review of Books, issues dated January 26, 1978, February 9, 1978, February 23, 1978. However, Sontag nowhere mentions the idea of barrenness-as-disease.

⁶²Aidoo, Anowa, p. 40.

⁶³Ibid, p. 38.

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 32.

⁶⁵Konadu, A Woman in Her Prime, p. 7.

⁶⁶Aidoo, Anowa, p. 36.

⁶⁷Konadu, pp. 19, 22.

⁶⁸Konadu, p. 89.

⁶⁹Aidoo, Anowa, p. 24.

⁷⁰Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 100

⁷¹Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments (New York: Collier Books, 1971), pp. 41-2.

⁷²Konadu, p. 35.

⁷³J.A. Korneh, "I Want A Child," Ideal Woman, Vol. 6, No. 5 (December 1976), pp. 8, 18.

⁷⁴Jean Baker Miller, M.D., ed., Psychoanalysis and Women (London: Penguin Books Inc., 1973), p. 35.

⁷⁵Oppong, pp. 32, 33.

⁷⁶Little, Chap. 6.

⁷⁷Ibid, Chap. 1, 2.

⁷⁸George Awooner Williams, "Just to Buy Corn," Okyeame, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1964), p. 22.

⁷⁹Ibid, p. 23.

⁸⁰Ibid, p. 22.

⁸¹Ibid, p. 23

⁸²Ibid, p. 24.

⁸³Ibid, p. 25,

⁸⁴Ibid, p. 29.

⁸⁵Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 61.

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 62.

⁸⁷Ibid, p. 67.

⁸⁸E. Ofori Akyea, "Holding Out," Okyeame, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1969), p. 61.

⁸⁹Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "Monogammy: Is It Really So Christian?" Africa Woman, No. 5 (July/August 1976), pp. 46-48.

⁹⁰Appiah-Kubi, p. 48.

⁹¹Lewis Nkosi, "Polygamy," Africa Woman, No. 7 (November/December 1976), pp. 24-25.

- ⁹²Nkosi, p. 25.
- ⁹³Ideal Woman, November 1975, p. 6.
- ⁹⁴Kwaw Ansah, "Mother's Tears," Okyeame, Vol. 4, No. 1 (December 1968), pp. 61-62.
- ⁹⁵Ibid.
- ⁹⁶Ibid.
- ⁹⁷Ibid, p. 64.
- ⁹⁸Ibid, p. 69.
- ⁹⁹Konadu, pp. 33, 158.
- ¹⁰⁰Appiah, p. 77.
- ¹⁰¹Efua Sutherland, Foriwa (Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1967), p. 7.
- ¹⁰²Little, Chap. 2.
- ¹⁰³Rufus Darpo, "High Cost of Brides," Africa Woman, No. 12 (November/December 1977), p. 44.
- ¹⁰⁴Austa Uwechue, "Bringing Up Your Baby," Africa Woman, No. 12 (November/December 1977), pp. 42-3.
- ¹⁰⁵Okello Oculi, "Beyond Malnutrition," Africa Woman, No. 5 (July/August 1976), pp. 48-9; Mike Muller and David Haworth, "EEC Milk Gift Could Spread Illness," Africa Woman, No. 6 (September/October 1976), p. 51; Funke Akinrefon, "Your Health and Nutrition," Ideal Woman, Vol. 4, No. 12, July 1975, p. 28.
- ¹⁰⁶Akin Fatayinbo, "Battle Against River Blindness," Africa Woman, No. 4 (April/May 1976), p. 43.
- ¹⁰⁷G. Adali-Mortty, "The Only Soup," Okyeame (January 1961), p. 34.
- ¹⁰⁸Adoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 97.

¹⁰⁹Awoonor Williams, p. 22.

¹¹⁰Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, p. 97.

¹¹¹Ibid, pp. 99, 98, 103.

Ghana: Conclusion:

Our research on the perceptions of and about Ghanaian women as shown in the imaginative and analytic literature indicates a need for the western development specialist to sensitize himself to the cultural differences between Ghanaian and western women. The Ghanaian man's and woman's perceptions of her social role as well as the interpersonal dynamics between Ghanaian men and women in turn influence how both Ghanaian men and women react to the development specialist trying to integrate women into the development process.

As mentioned earlier, Ghanaian women have always played a major role in agriculture and there are evidences in the literature of this fact. However, Ghanaian men may not emphasize this in their contact with westerners. The Ghanaian may communicate to the westerner what he perceives is expected and acceptable in western terms; his own sense of masculinity may play a role; style of communication and the perception of what is appropriate to communicate to different people may play a role. The fact is that Ghanaian women constitute over 50% of the total population, have always been food growers and are perceived as fundamental to all aspects of food processes.

Cultural values accord an enormous importance to the state of motherhood. The perception of procreation is intimately interwoven with that of the extended family, ancestors, etc. Family in this sense tends to be more important than marriage and unlike the western nuclear family unit.

Similarly, perceptions of health and nutrition are often inseparable from African religious values and customs. The African woman

is understandably reluctant to relinquish life-ways that are intimately integrated with the entire fabric of her life--socially and psychologically.

Finally, we urge the development specialist to consider that the Ghanaian's style, rhythm, substance and channels of communication differ from those of the westerner. When and how something is communicated are often more important than what is communicated. This, then, is an area of adjustment for the westerner, especially in the four subject areas concerned in this study.

Senegal: Synopsis

In the Senegal section, the long tradition of matriarchy as well as the forces that have weakened it--Islam, slavery, colonialism--are discussed in order to show that the Senegalese woman's social status is an ambiguous one. Generally speaking, in integrating Senegalese women into the development process, all parties are urged to consider:

- that Senegalese women play a major agricultural role and that in some cases this role excludes men according to traditional religious taboos;
- that the state of motherhood is revered and overlaps with every other area of the woman's life; and that barrenness is unacceptable;
- that because of Islam, polygamy is widespread in Senegal, and women are socially isolated from and subservient to men; that many women are in fact sole heads of households and many others, neglected by their husbands, are in effect sole heads of households; that these women are in need of development assistance but because of religious and other cultural factors remain inaccessible and unresponsive to outside offers of aid; in short, they have been trained to behave unassertively;
- that Senegalese women are in great need of assistance in the area of health and nutrition but that religious and traditional custom often precludes their receptivity to and adoption of western medical and nutritive measures; that it is essential for the westerner to sensitize himself to Senegalese custom, including modes and channels of communication.

Work and Food Production: Our findings in both literary works and films indicate the formidable cultural power exercised by the woman in the area of food growing. The films and filmmaker's comments are particularly revealing of the rich significance of the woman's agricultural role.

Other literary and cinematic images reveal the oppression and restriction the working woman suffers as well as the function of work

in the interpersonal relations of the traditional woman's life. The conflict concerning work roles between the older, traditional generation and the younger generation is represented as well. The resourcefulness, courage and even militancy of urban women whose husbands and kin cannot find work is a dominant theme in many literary and cinematic works.

Question of Motherhood; the Value of Children: Findings in both anthropological and psychoanalytic works as well as in literary works stress the essential role of childbearing in the woman's life. The awe with which female fertility is perceived and the supreme respect paid to the woman who is a mother are themes in a number of literary passages.

In addition, the extreme physical and emotional closeness between mother and child, the permissiveness of mothers toward their young children, and the latter's precocity are important aspects of motherhood, according to our findings.

The Woman, Sole Head of Household; Polygamy: Literary images demonstrate that widows, neglected polygamous wives, and unmarried mothers may all, in effect, be sole heads of households in Senegal. Our research indicates the deprivation and loneliness suffered by these women, and the negative effect of Islam is often stressed.

The journalistic literature indicates ambivalence toward polygamy on the parts of men and women. The literary and cinematic images reveal the oppressiveness of polygamy, especially when coupled with Islam, on the lives of Senegalese women. However, these images also demonstrate that women are perceived as strong, independent individuals, still in touch with their matriarchal tradition.

Health: The key role of women in traditional medicine as well as the negative influences of religious taboos and persistent poverty on health are stressed in the literary, cinematic, and analytic sources consulted. A film concerning the perception and treatment of an emotionally disturbed girl in a traditional village is described and interpreted, demonstrating that mental illness is an area meriting further study in the effort to integrate women into development.

SENEGAL

As matriarchy and matriliney were and still are cultural forces among the Akan people of Ghana, so has there been a long tradition of matriarchy among the various Senegalese groups--Wolofs, Serers, Diolas, Bambaras, Fulani, etc., all of which can be further broken down into dialect subgroups. However, the dynamics of matriarchy have differed from group to group, each being culturally and linguistically unique, and gradually under the influences of Islam, slavery, and colonialism, matriarchy has been significantly diluted as a force in the culture.

In an essay on matriarchy as the historical proof of the high status of women in traditional African life, Siga Sow, a Senegalese writer, defines matriarchy as a kinship system in which the mother's name is passed on to her children and in which the maternal blood bond is the legal, binding bond.¹ As among the Akan people, the child's maternal uncle plays an important role in the child's life, as does the paternal aunt. In addition, the rules of matriarchy determine those of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.² (Both matriarchy and matriliney are defined at the beginning of the Ghana section.)

Both Siga Sow and Madeleine Deves, another writer on Senegalese women, emphasize the agricultural origins of matriarchy, which, when combined with the restorative, curing powers ascribed to women, bestowed on them the status of sole givers and conservers of life.³ (We discussed this at some length in the preceding section.) Thus the woman was autonomous

in the maintenance of the "moral and social equilibrium" of the group and entitled, among other things, to "make and unmake" marriages, and to enjoy exclusive female organizations which exercised real political leverage in the group.⁴ In royal families, the Linguere, the mother, sister, or niece of the king, was invested with preeminent authority, especially over the other women in her community; she was accompanied by a "court" of women, of captives, and a military escort. In some groups, women succeeded to the throne.⁵

Islam, which has a very long history in Senegal, worked against matriarchy. The strength of Islam in a community has tended to proportionately weaken the status of that group's women, although opinions to the contrary persist. In Islam, Deves writes, the woman is conceived of as an impure being by virtue of inherent physiological qualities. (She notes that this same line of thinking was at the base of the ancient notion of infirmitas sexus.) Moreover, she is considered a legal minor.⁶ [This effectively groups her with children--not to mention slaves--and children are proverbially "seen but not heard."] In addition, the unmarried woman in Islam is considered unacceptable. "This idea is so firmly rooted," writes Deves, "that when a woman dies unmarried, her family rectifies the situation by marrying her posthumously to an available man. This is called takou boume marriage."⁷ (Deves does not say that this is always done, and we would assume that it is not.) In short, matriarchy, under Islam,

was in principle rejected and in practice suppressed (but not destroyed), and patriarchy was imposed.

The introduction of western values and ways further weakened the position of the traditional woman in Senegal, as elsewhere. Because colonizers were often simply ignorant of the key role the women played in the society, they excluded her. Deves writes that "colonizers went in search of native auxiliaries and in these terms thought only of men."⁸ In the process, a class division between the sexes developed which weakened family solidarity and conjugal relationships. The woman's traditional role was disvalued, but no new, positive role took its place. This led to an "intellectual and spiritual impoverishment."⁹

We shall see in the Senegalese literature and films the collision and interpenetration of all these elements--the traditional, the Islamic, the western--in the life of the Senegalese woman. The oldest and most profound force is the traditional, and it often appears that the western element especially has been grafted on to the traditional so as to remain superficial in almost a tragi-comic way.

I. WORK AND FOOD PRODUCTION

The Ghanaian folktale in which the old woman has a mysterious and powerful connection to food growing has its parallel in Senegalese literature. In "Samba-of-the-Night," recorded by Birago Diop, a small boy, mysteriously born, goes off in quest of wives for his seven brothers, who have gone off for the same reason. In the course of his journey, Samba comes upon a "tall, large hut" that rises to the clouds. In a booming voice, he asks if the place is inhabited. "An old woman, a very old woman, a very very old woman, an older than older woman whose chin was almost touching the ground, supported by a long staff, appeared on the threshold of the large hut and grumbled: 'What have you come to do here? Who has given you permission to trample on my land and the threshold of my house?' "10 Samba tells her that they are looking for seven wives for his seven brothers, and the woman mysteriously produces seven daughters for the men. Then they eat. But Samba claims to eat only special food:

' A pudding made of red millet, a grain of which must be sown before the last ray of sun; this grain must grow [and be] scythed ... thrashed ... winnowed ... pounded ... sieved ... mashed ... steamed ... remashed.

'The pudding must be mixed with the milk of a seven-year-old cow which has produced hieifers seven times.¹¹

The old woman produces Samba's pudding instantly. She sows a grain of red millet in her eroded soil, and it grows "visibly." She repeats this with a seed of cotton in order to weave a coverlet for Samba. At the end of the tale, the old

woman turns herself into a jujube-tree by thrusting "herself into some roots in the ground."

We see here the same elements that were at work in the Ghanaian Ashanti tale: the old woman has superrational power and knowledge with respect to the earth and food growing. Her entering the roots of a tree corresponds to the Ashanti woman's living underground:

The tree root is significant because it is the nodal point of contact between the nether world and the habitation of the living. It is also fixed in the earth, which for the African mind carries profound significance: sustainer of life, abode of the dead-- ambiguous symbol of contrarities and therefore a central symbol of the nature of knowledge and truth. It is then clear why, in primal mythology, the secret of life is often found through a descent into the world under the surface of the earth.¹²

Like the Ashanti woman, she produces food instantly; and when she is shown disrespect, she punishes the offender by removing or spoiling his food supply. And she too, according to the tale, is a witch. The lesson of both stories is that she is to be feared as much as respected.

In addition, both tales link the old woman with a young, rather precocious male child, too young to have passed through initiation rites, after which he will be grouped with adult males and thus somewhat polarized from the females.

In another tale, "La Cuiller Sale,"¹³ a young girl is sent on a long journey by her cruel step-mother to wash a cooking utensil. On the way she meets "the mother of the beasts," who instructs her to pound a single grain in the mortar. She does so and they enjoy an ample meal of couscous.

She follows other bizarre instructions and is rewarded by riches of all kinds. After her triumphant return home, her half-sister, preferred by the step-mother, is sent on the same journey in the hope that she too will become rich. But, as in the Ashanti tale, the greedy, proud individual disobeys the strange orders; her punishment is to be devoured by the animals of the forest. Her heart is then returned to the village, mysteriously, and dropped into the calabash of couscous being prepared by her evil mother.

The old woman in the first story and the mother of the beasts above are both mythological versions of woman, giver (and taker) of all life. One can see how this perception of woman, a perception filled with awe and fear, led to and reinforced through time her matriarchal status in society.

Similarly, in "Emitai,"¹⁴ a film by Sembene Ousmane, we see very powerfully the exclusive relationship between the women and the rice crop. The film was shot in Ekok in the Casamance, very fertile country in southern Senegal, inhabited by the Diolas who are fetishists and a very mystical people.

In the film, set at the end of World War II, a detachment of French soldiers is sent to the village to collect fifty tons of rice--sixty pounds per villager--needed for the French troops; obviously, this will deplete the village's supply. The women, unaccompanied by any man, hide the rice, while the men repair to the sacred forest to consult their fetish gods and debate among themselves as to what action to

take. In the absence of the men, the women are taken hostages and, because of their firm refusal of rice, are made to sit in the hot sun, without water, babies in arms, for hours. They are absolutely intransigent, and the longer they are mistreated, the more resolved to protect their rice and support their men. In the end, it is the men who collaborate with the French in giving up the rice.

In discussing "Emitai" (the god of thunder), Sembene has emphasized the independence and the very active role--versus the men's relatively passive role in the film--played by Diola women in their society.¹⁵ First, the crop is under their exclusive control. It is taboo for men to dispose of it in any way. During the filming, Sembene told an interviewer: "I have already filmed--at a distance--a harvest ceremony in a sacred wood, during which the women of the village asked the goddess of abundance if it was a propitious time to harvest their rice. ...The Diola women assured me that the real goddess appeared and approved of the harvest."¹⁶ Thus the agricultural role of the women places them in the privileged position of communicating with the divine forces that direct the rhythmed life of the entire village.

Elsewhere in discussing "Emitai," Sembene said: "When the women learn of the betrayal of the men in giving up the rice, ...they cry and chant that the men have lost the meaning of life in violating the rice taboo. ...The men in turn take up the chant, renounce their betrayal and prefer death. Therein lies the cultural power that determines certain actions."¹⁷

The "cultural power" of the Diola women referred to by Sembene may be understood as the interior, invisible, therefore secret and mystical quality of the women's social role: pregnancy and childbirth are "interior," secret processes; similarly, the women hide the rice in the interior of the forest. (Only they know the hiding place; the men find the rice by tracing their footprints.) Both events are exclusively female and taboo-ridden. The cultural position of the men is an exterior, visible one, as is their genital, phallic power.

It should be clear that when we speak of matriarchy having its origins in agriculture, we are referring to "agriculture" as a rich and complex process which is perceived and ritualized by the African as a fragile life-and-death series of events.

But the women are not fragile of character. Sembene comments on their tendency to act decisively in the face of a threat, while the men postpone action.¹⁸ (Sembene recently told the story of a protest action in Senegal in which the villagers were going to throw themselves into a well. The women said to the men, "You go first," because they did not trust them to carry it through.)¹⁹

In the literature and films of Africa, there are myriad images of women carrying loads of water or foodstuffs on their heads, working in the fields with children strapped to their backs and at their sides, and pounding food in the courtyard

of the compound. It should be clear that these images-- whether seen in African art or firsthand by the westerner-- can be deceptive. The toiling woman appears burdened, a mere slave. She often is burdened, but at the same time may possess a unique prestige and "cultural power" derived in large part from the value placed on her work role.

In contrast, other images of working women bespeak lives of restriction and exploitation. Usually such women are illiterate and Moslem, in polygamous marriages, and live, if not in a city, on the poor slum fringes of one. Such a woman grows what food she can in a small plot or field nearby, but not with the success of the Diolas of Efo.

An example of this kind of woman is Maimouna in Mahama Johnson Traore's film, "Diankha-Bi" (The Young Girl).²⁰ The refrain recurring throughout the film is "Tradition, your weight is heavy." Maimouna's world consists of "the market place, the fountain, the family courtyard," all places of work. In the courtyard, we see Maimouna pounding food, carrying water, lighting a fire, washing clothes; most of the time she works alone, exchanging a few words with her mother who presides at mealtimes when the women eat separately from the men. Maimouna has learned her work roles (and all other roles too) from her mother who supervises her strictly. During a good part of the film, Maimouna's father is shown sitting comfortably in a chaise lounge in the shade of a tree, dressed in an immaculately white boubou,

"telling" his beads, and nodding his head authoritatively to the various women who bow to him as they pass or stoop to serve him.

Maimouna's sister, Seynabou, does not do traditional women's work. She dresses in western clothes, wears make-up and a wig, attends classes and frequents night-clubs. Traore portrays her as the woman who has gone to the extreme in adopting western ways. In one shot, she is shown trying to pound grain. But she has lost the knack of manipulating the pestle and nearly knocks the mortar over. The effect is both sad and comic. Seynabou's detachment from traditional work symbolizes her disconnection from the group and her cultural impoverishment.

In White Genesis, one of Sembene's major works, he refers to the totality of traditional tasks this way:
" ... all these daily activities, all of them elements of her life as a woman and a wife, ... all the things that bound her to others."²¹ Thus, as mentioned in the Ghana section, the African woman's work must be seen in the context of her interpersonal relations. If she cannot or chooses not to work (with and for others), she is portrayed as suffering a social and psychological isolation.

Other images are of women who are unfailingly ingenious at supplying the long awaited meal which their husbands cannot supply. In Sembene Ousmane's film "Tauw,"²² a mother sells her husband's trousers so her son will have the cash he needs to apply for a job at the city dockyard. (The very fact that

he must pay to apply for a job is meaningful in the film.) She says she will tell her husband that she sold them to buy food. Later, her husband beats and severely reprimands her for having sold his clothes. Other women offer their bus money to Tauw. The sense of community solidarity is very strong in this film, and it is the women who promote it. Unfortunately, at the end of the film, Tauw has not found a job.

In "Borom Sarret,"²³ also by Sembene, a man from a Dakar slum spends his day trying to earn enough money to buy dinner for his family. At the end of the day, not only has he not earned anything, but he has been robbed. The final shot of the film is of his wife leaving the compound saying, "I promise you we will have dinner tonight." The implication is that she will prostitute herself for food. Both "Tauw" and "Borom Sarret" portray the exploitation of the lower class by the middle and upper-middle classes. It is strongly indicated that the men are far more alienated from society and demoralized from constant defeat than the women who have maintained their resourcefulness. (Sembene confirmed to this writer that this is the case.)

This resourcefulness of Senegalese women is depicted in a most unforgettable way in Sembene's novel, God's Bits of Wood. The novel is a veritable mine of images of women of all ages, different characters, expressing a wide range of needs and feelings. They are Bambara and Wolof women in whose

veins flows the energy of matriarchy, like the women in "Emitai," although these women's lives are on an expressway of change. The novel principally concerns the strike of the railway workers on the Dakar-Niger line which began on October 10, 1947 and lasted until March 19, 1948. The degree of the women's involvement at every step of the way and the effectiveness of the actions they take make it difficult to say just whether the men or their women are more important in securing the demands of the strikers. (As the strike is history, it is likely that many of the women characters in the novel are based on women Sembene has known.)

The oldest woman in the novel is the hero's grandmother, Niakoro. She is a Bambara, very proud, very traditional, and against the strike. She cannot see what is to be gained, only what will surely be lost--the lives of her "sons." Nor does she approve of the younger women's tendency to step outside their traditional roles. Her relationship with her granddaughter, Ad'jibid'ji, eight or nine years old, while very tender and loving, reveals this tension between the traditional and modern: Niakoro remembers her youth:

In the old days, the singing of the pestles had begun even before the morning star disappeared in the first light of dawn. From courtyard to courtyard the women had exchanged their unceasing, pounding rhythms, and the sounds had seemed to cascade through the smoky air like the song of a brook rushing through a deep ravine. To the sharp rap of one pestle against the rim of a mortar, another rapping had answered. The women at work in their homes in the early morning greeted each other thus, in a dialogue only they understood 24

(Again, work is portrayed as a kind of interpersonal glue, enhancing the close relationships between traditional women.)

Ad'jibid'ji, in contrast, is the epitome of new times. She is going to school, learning French, and is interested in the workings of the men's strike. Niakoro reproves her:

'To be a good mother you have no need of that. ... In my time we learned only some verses of the Koran, for our prayers. ... You don't even know how to prepare a couscous. That's what comes of always hanging about with the men, instead of staying beside your mother, where you belong.' This last phrase stung the child to the quick. 'This morning I went to the river alone to do the washing,' she stammered, 'and then I went to the market. For three days we have been grinding, and I was always there. And tonight I cleaned up from the meal.' ... she wanted to cry out that she was free and independent. She wished she might explain that word--
independence. ²⁵

(Recall the traditional grandmother in the Ghanaian novel The Ashanti Doll who does not see the value of education, but only of traditional women's work, for her granddaughter.)

In Thies, the strikers and their families live in the slum. "... in the midst of this corruption, a few meager bushes--wild tomato, dwarf peppers, and okra--whose pitiful fruits were harvested by the women. ... Constantly hungry, naked children, with sunken chests and swollen bellies, argued with the vultures."²⁶

In the marketplace, the Thies women sell the foodstuffs they manage to grow as well as those bought from rural farmers. But the strike crushes the food commerce and there is no water to drink or anything to eat in the city. During the strike there is a battle between the soldiers and people of

Thies in the market place. "Dieynaba [one of the market women] had rallied the women of the market place, and like a band of Amazons they came to the rescue, armed with clubs, with iron bars, and bottles."²⁷ Colliding with a man rushing away from the battle, Dieynaba hands him a rock to throw: "Where are you going, coward?"²⁸ she says.

Toward the end of the novel, the women march from Thies to Dakar in a great show of solidarity among themselves and with their men. The leader of the women, Penda, a strong-willed young woman who had been a prostitute, is shot just outside Dakar when a line of soldiers tries to prevent their entering the city. The march and the battle mentioned above typify the role played by the women in the novel. They stop short of nothing to support their men and to ensure the survival of their families, which is sorely threatened. Women, like Ramatoulaye, who "had always been quiet and unassuming and gentle with the children ... had found new strength, ... Where had this violence been born? What was the source of this energy so suddenly unleashed? ... The answer was as simple as the woman herself. It had been born beside a cold fireplace, in an empty kitchen."²⁹ The following quote from the novel cannot be excluded, as it expresses so well Sembene's perception of the women of his country:

The days passed, and the nights. In this country, the men often had several wives, and it was perhaps because of this that, at the beginning, they were scarcely conscious of the help the women gave them. But soon they began to understand that, here, too, the age to come

would have a different countenance. When a man came back from a meeting, with bowed head and empty pockets, the first things he saw were always the unfired stove, the useless cooking vessels, the bowls and gourds ranged in a corner, empty. Then he would seek the arms of his wife, without thinking, or caring, whether she was the first or the third. And seeing the burdened shoulders, the listless walk, the women became conscious that a change was coming for them as well.

But if they were beginning to feel closer to the lives of their men, what was happening to the children? In this country, they were many, so many that they were seldom counted. But now they were there, idling in the courtyards or clinging to the women's waistcloths, their bones seeming naked, their eyes deep-sunk, and on their lips a constant, heart-bruising question: "Mother, will there be something to eat today?" Then the mothers would gather together, by fours perhaps, or tens, the infants slung across their backs, the brood of older children following; and the wandering from house to house began. Someone would say, "Let's go to see so-and-so. Perhaps she still has a little millet." But most of the time so-and-so could only answer, "No, I have nothing more. Wait, and I'll come with you." Then, carrying a baby against a flaccid breast, she would join the procession.

The days were mournful, and the nights were mournful, and the simple mewling of a cat set the people trembling.

One morning a woman rose and wrapped her cloth firmly around her waist and said, "Today, I will bring back something to eat."

And the men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women.³⁰

II. QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD; THE VALUE OF CHILDREN

"An African woman sets greater store by her children than by her husband, for it is only by becoming a mother that she feels truly fulfilled,"³¹ writes Denise Paulme in her introduction to Women of Tropical Africa.

Solange Faladé, an African psychoanalyst (a woman), writes of Wolof women:

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of pregnancy to a Wolof woman.... Motherhood is one of the things most ardently desired, and childlessness can be a cause for the annulment of a marriage. To be a mother not only ensures the stability of her marriage, but also confers respect upon her as a woman.³²

Monique Gessain writes of Senegalese Coniagui women:

The essential value of a woman lies in her fecundity, and it is over the question of children that tension is most often created between husband and wife, both of whom want to have as many children as possible. 'How can my wife have any cause for complaint against me?' said an informant to me, a Coniagui who travelled a lot, leaving his family at home. 'Every time I go home, she is pregnant within a month.' Conversely, a man whose wife has borne him few children will complain about her. The loss of a child, or of several children often leads to divorce among the Coniagui. ... If her husband cannot give her children, a woman will seek out other men. The husband will not like it, but will say nothing and will be delighted with the children. A woman who is unable to have children will consult a healer, or offer sacrifices to the ancestors to ask for their pardon, for childlessness is often regarded as punishment for a sin, [Recall Pokuwaa from A Woman in Her Prime.] If a pregnant woman has a miscarriage, she will try to discover the spirit through which someone has brought [it] about. It might also have been due to an evil spell cast on the woman by a former rejected suitor. Sometimes, as a cure for

childlessness, a woman and her husband will leave the village; or the woman will leave her husband and his village and return home to her family. There are also certain remedies, such as eating a queen ant. [My ital.]³³

Finally, in Sembene Ousmane's novel Ô Pays, Mon Beau Peuple!, an old woman recalls the early years of her marriage during which she suffered a series of stillbirths--caused by an evil eye that had cursed her, it was said. During her last pregnancy, she had sought out a sorcerer to help her. Sembene comments parenthetically: "In a country where sterility is forbidden, a woman cannot live among her rivals [co-wives] without offspring. Often, divorce is demanded, the dowry returned, and shame falls upon the family."³⁴

These statements by two anthropologists and a psychoanalyst, as well as the quote from Sembene's novel, should make it clear that in Senegal, as in Ghana and everywhere on the African continent, the bearing of children and the state of motherhood are of supreme importance, and barrenness bears the stigma of sin and is perceived as being as abnormal as disease. Just as references to the importance of the mother pervade the anthropological literature on Africa, so the image of the mother so pervades the imaginative literature (not to mention film and all the other graphic and plastic arts) that one hardly knows where to begin in cataloguing the images.

In the folktale "Samba-of-the-Night," discussed above in connection with food production, the fertile woman's

ability to produce children is mythologized in two ways: she gives birth to seven children on the same day; she carries on a dialogue with the restless child in her womb.

'Mother, give birth to me!'
'And how can I bear you if it is not yet time?'
For seven days and nights this had been the dialogue between poor Koumba, already mother of seven boys who had been born on the same day, and the child who was stirring in her womb, when she went to bed at the hard day's end.
'Mother, give birth to me!'
'And how can I bear you if it is not yet time?'
'Very well, I shall do it by myself!' said the child at the first cock-crow.
And he cut his own umbilical cord, washed himself, and was at the foot of his mother's bed when the midwives, attracted by the mother's cries, entered the hut and bewilderedly asked:
'What's this? What's to be said?'
'I am!' said the child who was visibly growing.
.....
The old women took to flight.³⁵

Later, the same old woman who sowed the seeds of red millet and of cotton which "grew visibly" claims to have born "all on the same night ... seven young girls more beautiful than the brightness of the sun."³⁶ (The number seven has a universally magical significance.)

One sees the idealization of a large number of children, reinforced by the magic number seven, and the mysterious relationship between the precocious child and the mother, communicating while he is still in the womb. (The precocity of the African child will be mentioned below.)

In two stories by Sembene Ousmane we see the social rights of a woman defended solely because she is a mother.

The decisive "ethics" in both cases is the same--her state of being a mother supercedes all other considerations in the case.

In the first story, entitled "The Mother," a despot king decrees that "No man shall marry a girl unless He be the first to spend the night with her."³⁷ The king's behavior is base and vile; insatiable, he orders that all men over the age of fifty be killed; next he demands that all girls of marriageable age be his, and so on. Finally the mother of a girl whom the king has had carried off confronts him:

Sire by the look of you, anyone would think that you have no mother. From the day you were born until now, you have contended only with women, because they are weak. The pleasure you derive from it is more vile than the act itself.... I'm not angry with you for you do have a mother, and through mothers I respect every human being....³⁸

Outraged, the king orders the woman killed, but no one will lay a hand on her. Finally, his subjects seize the king and lead him away. The story ends with the refrain:

Glory to all, men and women, who have had the courage to defy slanderous tongues. Praise to all women, unfailing well-springs of life, who are more powerful than death. ... Glory to thee little child, little girl already playing at being the mother. ... The boundless ocean is as nothing beside the boundless tenderness of a mother.³⁹

In the second story, "The Bilal's Fourth Wife," a young girl of nineteen is married by her father to the bilal who is "past middle-age." (A bilal is one who calls the people to prayer and looks after the mosque.) She agrees obediently

but unwillingly. She has a child, but gradually the old man neglects her and she takes a lover by whom she has a second child. At the divorce trial, there is a controversy over who shall have custody of the youngest child. According to Koranic law, the father should have custody of the child. But the great wiseman asked to preside over this controversial case raises the question:

'...are we sure that a child should be returned to its father by right of birth? ... I myself, here before you, I lost my father when I had been in my mother's womb for only two months. The death of my father did not prevent me from coming into the world ... But now consider that the contrary had happened, that my mother had died when two months pregnant. Should I be alive now?

'No, no,' shouted the crowd.

'So by what right does Suliman [the bilal] demand custody of the child? There can always be doubt as to who is the father of a child. But never as to who is the mother.'⁴⁰

This is the assertion of traditional, customary law, which was matriarchal and matrilineal, against Islamic law, which is patrilineal.

In both stories, the extant male authority--military and juridical respectively--is effectively bypassed by the cultural power and authority implicit in motherhood. No male is equal to it. In these stories, as in all his work, Sembene celebrates the wisdom of traditional African values which acknowledge that the woman's rights are natural rights and that in violating them the society crumbles from within.

There is another aspect of motherhood worth discussing and that is the extreme closeness between mother and child and the resultant precocity of the child. The African mother-

child relationship is as intense and, ideally, as complete, as any relationship imaginable. Thus, one can understand why the state of motherhood is simply assumed for every young African woman and why for the man the notion of Woman-as-Mother is a dominant force in his psycho-sexual life.

Gessain writes of the Coniagui: "...a man will, throughout his life, consider his mother to be the only woman he can trust, really the only woman who does not share the faults of her sex. The ideal woman, it would appear, is the mother."⁴¹ [Ital. mine] We saw in the first story above that the men were not forced to ensure the honor of the Mother; they sprang to it spontaneously.

In an essay on the educational role of the African woman in traditional society, Rose Senghor and Aminata Sow describe the closeness of mother and child in early life as well as in the period between puberty and marriage.⁴² (During this time boys are usually socialized by their fathers and the adult males of the group.) The child is carried on mother's back and is breast-fed whenever he desires--until the age of two or more. They write: "This continuous contact encourages the harmonious and precocious development of the African child."⁴³ In addition, they emphasize the permissiveness of mother toward baby: the Senegalese mother never corrects a child less than four years old; she gives him what he asks for at this early age. Also, by talking a great deal and gesturing to the child, she encourages his articulateness. In this connection, they mention that the African mother uses pronouns (I, you) in such a way as to stimulate the child's sense of separateness and individuality.⁴⁴

Games and play, often consisting of imitation of adult activities, are also very important in the child's early life. The little girl carries objects on her back in imitation of her mother carrying a baby. Later, the child learns to assist her mother in all household tasks as well as in food growing and gathering. By the age of twelve, she can manage all the household chores, including preparing meals and carrying them to the adults working in the fields.⁴⁵ In other words, by age twelve, the young girl has learned how to and is waiting to be a wife and mother.

The film entitled "Cradle of Humanity," produced by UNICEF, concerns just these aspects of the mother-child relationship. (This film is highly recommended to AID project design officers by this writer.) From the moment of birth, when the "after-birth" and placenta are buried near the mother's hut, the exclusive mother-child relationship unfolds. Babies are vigorously massaged, not delicately handled as by western nurses and mothers, thereby giving them a keen sense of their bodies from an early age. The mother sleeps on a mat with the child, nursing him at intervals, and holds him between her ankles when he urinates. In short, the child is in continuous, supportive contact with the warmth of the mother's touch and only very gradually, not abruptly, "weaned" away from this constant closeness to her. When the mother herself cannot offer a breast, another woman gladly does so, even if only for the child to play with. The film shows the co-wife of a woman offering her breast to the latter's baby, although she has no milk. The gift is a symbolic one.

Denise Paulme writes, "In all [African] societies, ... sons, whether princes or peasants, will always remain small boys in the eyes of their mother. ..."46 (It is significant that she does not say the same for daughters.) In O Pays, Mon Beau [^]Peuple! by Sembene Ousmane, Rokhaya, now an old woman, recalls the difficult birth of her son and his first years during which he was ill. "Nothing mattered to her but that he live."47 Now Oumar, her son, has returned from France, after years of absence, with a French wife. Rokhaya is afraid she will once again lose him:

'Maybe I talk nonsense, but for me, you see, you are still my little boy. And when you were in the white man's land and I waited for you, I felt a heaviness near my heart as if I still carried you. ... I want you to be mine, not everyone else's. I carried you, I sacrificed everything for you ... Your very breath became my life.' ...
'My little one, my very own little one.' The rough hand of the woman ... caressed the face in which she still saw the face of her child!48

It is only when Isabelle, Oumar's wife, becomes pregnant that Rokhaya can begin to accept her. "The child the young woman was carrying became a part of her."49 Rokhaya, highly superstitious and a fetishist, initiates Isabelle to the rites and cures she practices for pregnancy and childbirth.

It has been commented that in all cultures around the world, sons remain small boys in the eyes of their mothers. Generally true, but in African culture where childbearing and rearing is so supremely valued and rewarded, a woman especially dreads the passing of her nurturing years. In a sense, her life is then over.

We have seen in Senegalese literature and film the importance not only of childbearing but of the mother and the primacy of motherhood among all other forms of authority. In addition, motherhood is perceived as an intricate art--passed on from generation to generation. Field work remains to be done in this area.

III. THE WOMAN SOLE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD; POLYGAMY

The opening discussion in the second part of the Ghanaian section of the African woman who is sole head of household applies in general to Senegal as well. We would hypothesize that the dominant presence of Islam in Senegal (over 80%) as compared with Ghana (about 12%) as well as the distinct characteristics of the Senegalese cultural groups, differing in some ways from those of Ghana, and even the presence of French culture, as opposed to British in Ghana, would all affect the question of the Senegalese woman as sole head of household. This hypothesis remains to be tested by field work.

In the following examples from Senegalese literature, the woman-sole head of household is a widow, an unmarried woman with children, a woman whose husband is away in search of work, a polygamous woman who rarely sees her husband, receives minimal support from him, and who has no other source of support. (It appears that a woman in this kind of polygamous situation often falls into the category of sole head of household.)

The mother figure, Daro, in Abdoulaye Sadji's novel Maimouna is a widow. She has two daughters: Rihanna, uneducated, married to a civil servant and living a comfortable middle-class life in Dakar; and Maimouna, the beautiful little girl who is the only bright light in her mother's life. Daro and Maimouna live poorly in Louga where Daro makes a precarious living by selling foodstuffs at the market. Rihanna sends her a "meager pension" monthly from Dakar. Daro is a religious Moslem and prays with Maimouna at her side, the two united by the "same

obscure ideal as they are in all the circumstances of their lives." 50 Not for long, however, for "Mai" chooses to leave her mother and join her sister in Dakar where life is more attractive. Daro is deeply pained by Mai's rejection of their shared life and reminds Maimouna that she has sacrificed everything for her, even remarriage; she has remained a widow and poor market woman in order to devote herself entirely to rearing her daughter, preparing a good future for her. The end of the novel is particularly poignant, for Maimouna returns to Louga pregnant, having rejected the many suitors advanced by her sister and brother-in-law in Dakar. The boy she loves and waits for, the father of her unborn child, does not marry her. She becomes severely ill, loses her child, recovers, having lost her dazzling beauty and becomes partially blind, to find herself a poor market woman like her mother. The novel emphasizes the contrast between the life of the poor rural woman and that of the urban woman. The latter--represented by Rihanna in Dakar--is more dependent on men for the middle-class security she has learned to need. In Louga, Daro is alone and poor but supported emotionally by her solidarity with the other village women, who are as poor as she is. Her life, nevertheless, is one of "suffering, poverty and humiliation." 51

In Sembene's God's Bits of Wood, a character also named Maimouna is "the mother of children without a father." 52 She is totally blind, the mother of twins, and a poor market woman. No one, except Maimouna herself, knows who the father of the twins is. This, she says, "is of no importance any longer."

What is important to her is being "with my child, who will always be mine. A child may not know its father, but what child can question the body in which it lived for nine long months?"⁵³ (Here is the same theme we saw in "The Bilal's Fourth Wife.") Maimouna never loses her extraordinary dignity and strength of character, even when one twin is brutally killed in a skirmish between police and market women, and she marches with the other women to Dakar in the front lines. She is not pitiable, but "like some goddess of the night, her head high, her vacant glance seeming to contemplate an area above people, beyond the world."⁵⁴ Maimouna's intense solidarity with the other women of Thies is the only support she can count on. And these women are also terribly poor, often sole household heads themselves.

Arame, another young mother in God's Bits of Wood, lives alone in Dakar; her husband has gone to Madagascar to work and she has no means of support. (It is likely that she comes from a rural family and so could conceivably return to a rural life, under the circumstances.) Illiterate, she cannot communicate with her husband by letter to tell him that "the children have nothing to eat, and they aren't well. I'm not well myself... and that we have to live for three days on one day's food."⁵⁵

Finally, the polygamous woman, whose husband offers no support at all and who sacrifices much to please him: this is Noumbe, mother of five children, prematurely aged, with severe heart trouble, the third of the four wives of Mustapha. Sembene's story entitled "Her Three Days," shows how a polygamous wife who "falls into disfavour" can become in effect

a sole head of household. Noubé and her five children live in "her one-room shack, ... sparsely furnished," which has only one bed. She never asks her husband for money. "Indeed, hadn't she got herself into debt so that he would be more comfortable and have better meals at her place?"⁵⁶ In order to further economize, Noubé does not take her medicine properly, but mixes it with wood-ash and water so it will last longer. She dreads the day when she will fall into disfavour as had the second wife, for then she will be truly alone. But one wonders if she and her children would not be better off then; for now, she keeps from them the food she has contracted debts to buy in order to please her husband, who rarely visits her. She herself, it seems, eats almost nothing. Her life is reduced to loneliness, deprivation, and waiting.

POLYGAMY

The images of polygamous women in Senegalese literature and film are very similar to those in Ghanaian literature. They are women who are victims of competitive, jealous situations, fearing abandonment, often lacking adequate financial support as well as emotional security. Africa Woman, in an article on Senegalese women, reports:

The majority of Senegal's women are entirely dependent upon their husbands to provide their basic needs since their earning power has not yet afforded them economic independence. Due to polygamy and the ease with which a man could obtain a divorce, marriage offered little security but a new family law, adopted in 1974, makes it mandatory for the husband to fulfill his responsibilities.

"Divorce is by mutual consent. The divorcing husband must provide for his wife if she is without her own resources." (Excerpts from the new law.) ... however, few women are willing to bring court action against their husbands because they feel there is a stigma attached to it. ... 57

The article also reports that at a conference on the "Status of Marriage," the majority of an audience of men and women defended polygamy as an institution. In interviews conducted, most professional women were against it, although one "highly educated" professional woman finally chose a polygamous marriage because she had children and the young bachelors she knew were not "settled or dependable." The older man she married, she said, "understood my needs and took interest in my children." She admitted, though, that she would have preferred a monogamous marriage.⁵⁸ Without attractive alternatives, the woman will choose polygamy for reasons of security--economic and emotional.

However, many images of polygamous Senegalese women are often highly revealing of the oppressiveness of Islam, which confines women to lives of seclusion and obedience to their husbands or "masters." The Moslem wife must be humble, self-effacing, dissimulating, ever ready to serve and please, in other words, not a person, not an individual. When her middle-aged husband marries a woman the age of her daughter, she must swallow her rage, turning it in against herself, or be severely rebuked, even turned out. Because the Moslem woman has been taught the opposite of self-assertion, she often cannot know what she wants, let alone express it. The very idea of "alternatives" is antithetical to the obedient, submissive attitude of the Moslem woman, wife and mother.

It is such a situation that is expressed so provocatively by Sembene in his novella, White Genesis. Ngone War Thiandum, married for over twenty-five years, is the second of three wives. She is of noble lineage as is her husband. A religious Moslem, she has lived a life of submission, of "passive docility." But now she has discovered that her daughter is pregnant and that her husband is the father of the unborn child. For the first time in her life, she reacts:

Ngone War Thiandum had her place in society, ... : woman this, woman that, fidelity, unlimited devotion and total submission of body and soul to the husband who was her master after Yallah, so that he might intercede in her favour for a place in paradise. The woman found herself a listener. Outside her domestic tasks she was never given the opportunity to express her point of view.... She was a woman and, of all women, she thought, she had never had an intelligent idea...

Now she revolted against an order that had been established before she was born. A sea of anger welled up and roared within her, waking and sharpening her awareness of her frustration and placing the accepted moral values in question by baring them to the light of day.⁵⁹

The novella is rich in meaning, in its presentation of the complexities of Islam and Senegalese culture and history. Ngone's learning to form opinions and take action herself is a "shattering experience" for her. Her final act of revolt is suicide, an act which has a quite different meaning in African culture than in western. We will not discuss that here, but only point out that once again it is the Senegalese woman who points out the wrong in the social order and takes action to right it.

In "Her Three Days," mentioned above, Nourou waits endlessly for her husband to spend her "aye" with her. He arrives only on the third day. She suspects that he is with his fourth, youngest and recently married wife, as the second has fallen out of favour and the first is too old. She fixes elaborate meals for him and adorns herself carefully, although she is ill and feels unwell. The relationship among the co-wives seems to be one of continuous vendetta. When the second wife drops in to see her, she is only reminded of "the perfidy of words and the hypocrisy of rivals; and all part of the world of women. This observation did not get her anywhere, except to arouse a desire to escape from the circle of polygamy and to cause her to ask herself - it was a moment of mental aberration really - 'Why do we allow ourselves to be men's playthings?' "⁶⁰ Indeed, when she thinks fondly of her husband's presence for

three whole days, she asks the obvious question, "Why shouldn't it always be like that for every woman - to have a husband of one's own?"⁶¹ In the end, Mustapha arrives, behaves glibly, and Noume no longer able to contain her anger, expresses it in a veiled, sarcastic way. The bottled-up rage causes her a heart attack. Mustapha and his friends leaving say: "Heaven preserve us from having only one wife. They can go out to work then. ..."⁶²

Xala, Sembene Ousmane's novel and recently released film,⁶³ is a strong condemnation of polygamy and of all the social and political conditions in Senegal encouraging it. El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is marrying his third wife--for prestige. She is the same age as his eldest child, the daughter of his first wife. The first wife is traditional and, like her husband, has been to Mecca and is religious. She is most distressed by this marriage but unable to express her feelings. Sembene contrasts her with Rama, her daughter, who openly opposes her father's third marriage and defend's her mother's position. El Hadji strikes Rama, forbidding her to ever speak critically of him. In addition, Sembene contrasts Rama with El Hadji's third wife--they are the same age. The latter is told by her paternal aunt on her wedding night that she must always be patient with and try to please her husband, as this is a woman's duty.

"Xala" refers to the curse or evil spell of sexual impotency which strikes El Hadji on his wedding night and totally disrupts his life. Nothing worse could befall such a man, a polygamist,

father of eleven children, proud of his economic and sexual potency. He depletes his savings in order to consult with the best marabouts for a cure. In the end he loses his position in the community, his second and third wives; only the loyalty of his first wife remains. She is perhaps the strongest character in the story.

In "Ceddo,"⁶⁴ Sembene's most recent film, Princess Dior Yacine, daughter of the king of a village somewhere in Senegal, has been kidnapped by the villagers who are resisting a forceful conversion to Islam. The Imam, or Moslem priest, gradually usurps the king's position, has him killed, and to legitimize his "kingship" intends to marry the strong-willed, independent-thinking Dior Yacine. At the end of the film, she returns to her village, "rescued" by the Imam's men, and sees her people reduced to slaves; their heads are shaven, the women are grouped with the slaves--they have been stripped of their traditional ways. Dior sees clearly what she must do and in a matter of moments has skillfully taken a rifle out of the hands of one of the soldiers and shot the Imam. The film ends here. It has to date been banned in Senegal.

In a recent interview, Sembene was asked about the significance of Princess Dior. He said:

Men have always had a tendency to dominate women in African society. What is shown in Ceddo is a matriarchal era before the coming of Islam, an era when women had an important role. With the coming of Islam, and you will notice this in Ceddo, women were assigned inferior roles in society. ... In traditional Moslem culture,

women haven't even got the right to speak. ...
The Ceddo women are seated with the slaves, not
with the other Ceddo men. Only the princess,
when she comes, is found on the side of the men.

When the princess kills the Imam, it has great
symbolic significance for modern Senegal. This
action is contrary to present ideas and the role
that women now hold. And this is the only reason,
in my opinion, that the film has been banned
in Senegal. Women have no value in our Moslem-
dominated society and this representation of
women is something Islam cannot accept.⁶⁵

IV. HEALTH

In discussing Senegalese matriarchy, Siga Sow emphasizes the key role women have played in traditional medicine. Jealously guarded secrets of curing were passed on from mother to daughter. Gradually, women came to dominate not only the process of childbirth and childcare but of all other illnesses, including psychopathology.⁶⁶ We mentioned above that the old woman Rokhaya in O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple! is regarded as a sorceress with her elaborate array of cures and fetishist ceremonies.

We also see that Islam has made inroads to the traditional autonomy of women in the area of medicine. In Sadji's novel, Maimouna contracts malaria. Her mother's friend, Mame Raki, gives Maimouna a mixture of yellow powder and water, muffles a prayer, draws a breath and spits on the head of the sick girl. She assures Daro that Maimouna will be up and about the next day. But it is the marabouts who dominate the people in the area of illness and cure, writes Sadji. They have fear and suggestion on their side, and use them skillfully. As food has always had religious and social importance, the marabouts can use existing food taboos to reinforce their own position. We saw this in Ghanaian literature as well.

Invariably traditional medicine is combined with western ways, relatively new to most Africans. In "Her Three Days," Noumbe takes a prescribed medicine for her heart trouble. But when she runs low, or cannot afford to buy more, she simply mixes the prescription with wood-ash and water, or takes the wood-ash mixture alone.

One of the most important African films of recent years concerning women is Ababacar Samb-Markharam's "Kodou,"⁶⁷ which portrays the mental illness of a young girl and the response to it on the part of her family and the others in the village.

Kodou, about sixteen years old, lives with her mother and father, an older sister and younger brother. On the morning Kodou is having her lips tattooed, a long, very painful ritual accompanied by the chanting of the women, she interrupts the process, gets up and runs away in front of the on-looking villagers. When her mother learns that she has fled, she cries, pulls at her clothes, and rolls on the ground, saying that Kodou has disgraced the family. "Shame is on us, I could be dead!" (Lip tattooing represents a kind of spiritual accomplishment.) This is the beginning of Kodou's emotional withdrawal. Because she has reacted to the taunts of a band of village boys by striking one of them, her parents tie her to a tree in their courtyard. She speaks to no one, eats nothing, withdrawing more and more. Her parents, particularly her mother, believe that Kodou is mad, that she has been possessed by evil spirits.

Urged by a stranger, a man who passes through the village and takes pity on Kodou, her parents agree to take her to the hospital in Dakar where she is treated by a psychiatrist. The doctor diagnoses depression and treats her with shock therapy. Kodou tells the doctors that her family no longer loves her;

she repeats and insists on this. Although she remains withdrawn from her mother who visits her, the mother decides that the only cure is at the hands of a fetish healer. She takes her home. An ancestral healing ritual is performed during which there is much frenzied dancing by the women, the blood of a chicken sprinkled and continuous chanting. Kodou seems gradually revived and begins to participate in the ritual. She is considered healed by her family, but one suspects that Kodou simply acquiesces to the group in order to survive emotionally.

One is struck by the pressure of traditional life for the individual woman who values and tries to assert her individuality. Lip tattooing is a kind of torture, yet the young woman who rejects it suffers social ostracism. In addition, the extreme importance of the mother is underscored in the film; it is she who feels that all is lost when Kodou does not comply. When Kodou prefers not to speak to her mother who visits her in the psychiatric ward, the mother's only reaction is the categorical: "It is unnatural for a girl not to want to speak to her mother."

Kodou is the epitome of the oppressed traditional woman. Her reaction to oppression is treated by an intensified oppression, and so forth, in a vicious circle. She might have rebelled against an impossibly heavy work load, or to having children, or to a polygamous marriage. Under traditional circumstances, she would have been considered "possessed" in each case. Her withdrawal is viewed as an invasion of outside, malevolent forces, not as an expression of interior conflicts that can be resolved compassionately; it is seen not as a call for help but as a threat to the group. Anticipating this kind of reaction, most

women silently accept their preordained role. Kodou, in
rebellious, is all the more human, and forces us to reconsider
traditional life in terms of one individual woman's needs.

Footnotes

- ¹ Siga Sow, "The Matriarchal System As A Proof of the Social Role Played by the Woman in African Traditional Society," The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975), p. 340.
- ² Ibid, pp. 342-43.
- ³ Ibid, pp. 318, 348, 350.
- ⁴ Ibid, pp. 319-21.
- ⁵ Ibid, pp. 320-21.
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 322.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 323.
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 324.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ B. Diop, "Samba-of-the-Night," A Selection of African Prose, compiled by W.H. Whiteley, Vol. 2 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 123.
- ¹¹ Ibid, pp. 124-25.
- ¹² Maureen Warner Lewis, "The Nkuyu: Spirit Messengers of the Kumina," Savacou, (1977), p. 64.
- ¹³ Birago Diop, "La Cuiller Sale," Présence Africaine, No. 6 (1949).
- ¹⁴ Sembene Ousmane, "Emitai," 1972.
- ¹⁵ "Emitai ou la résistance collective," Jeune Afrique, No. 860, (July 1, 1977), p. 90.
- ¹⁶ "Ousmane Sembene," The New Yorker, September 25, 1971, p. 38.
- ¹⁷ "Emitai ou la résistance collective," p. 90.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ He told this story during a discussion following the screening of "Ceddo" on February 18, 1978 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.

- ²⁰ Mahama Johnson Traore, "Liankha-Bi," 1968.
- ²¹ Sembene, The Money Order with White Genesis, trans. Clive Wake (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972), p. 16.
- ²² Sembene, "Tauw," 1970.
- ²³ Sembene, "Borom Sarret," 1964.
- ²⁴ Sembene, God's Bits of Wood, trans. Francis Price (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), pp. 161-62.
- ²⁵ Ibid, pp. 37, 38, 39.
- ²⁶ Ibid, p. 49.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 61.
- ²⁸ Ibid, p. 62.
- ²⁹ Ibid, p. 129
- ³⁰ Ibid, pp. 75-6
- ³¹ Denise Paulme, Women of Tropical Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 14.
- ³² Solange Faladé, M.D., "Women of Dakar and the Surrounding Urban Area," Women of Tropical Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 224.
- ³³ Monique Gessain, "Coniagui Women," Women of Tropical Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 34-5; 36-7.
- ³⁴ Sembene, O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple! (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1957), pp. 22-3.
- ³⁵ Diop, "Samba-of-the-Night," p. 120.
- ³⁶ Ibid, p. 124.
- ³⁷ Sembene, Tribal Scars and other stories, trans. Len Ortzen (Washington, D.C.: Black Orpheus Press/Inscape, 1975), p. 34.

³⁸Ibid, p. 36.

³⁹Ibid, p. 37.

⁴⁰Ibid, pp. 16-17.

⁴¹Gessain, p. 43.

⁴²Rose Senghor and Aminata Sow, "The Educational Role of the African Women in the Traditional Society," The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975), pp. 232-41.

⁴³Ibid, p. 234.

⁴⁴Ibid, p. 235.

⁴⁵Ibid, pp. 235, 236.

⁴⁶Paulme, p. 14.

⁴⁷Sembene, O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple!, p. 23.

⁴⁸Ibid, pp. 88, 48, 30.

⁴⁹Ibid, p. 167.

⁵⁰Abdoulaye Sadj, Maimouna (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1958), p. 17.

⁵¹Ibid, p. 250.

⁵²Sembene, God's Bits of Wood, p. 60.

⁵³Ibid, p. 296.

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 53.

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 109.

⁵⁶Sembene, Tribal Scars, p. 43.

⁵⁷Aminatou Sanga, "Senegalese Woman," Africa Woman, No. 4 (April/May 1976), p. 33.

- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Sembene, The Money Order with White Genesis, pp. 14-15, 29.
- ⁶⁰ Sembene, Tribal Scars, p. 47.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, p. 41.
- ⁶² Ibid, p. 53.
- ⁶³ Sembene, Xala, trans. Clive Wake (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1976); "Xala," 1974.
- ⁶⁴ Sembane, "Ceddo," 1977.
- ⁶⁵ "Sembene," Seven Days, Vol. II, No. 3, (March 10, 1978), p. 27.
- ⁶⁶ Siga Sow, p. 350.
- ⁶⁷ Ababacar Samb-Makharam, "Kodou," 1971.

Senegal: Conclusions

Our research on the perceptions of and about Senegalese women as shown in the imaginative and analytic literature indicates a need for the western development specialist to sensitize himself to the cultural differences between Senegalese and western women. The Senegalese man's and woman's perceptions of her social role as well as the interpersonal dynamics between Senegalese men and women determine how both Senegalese men and women react to the development specialist trying to integrate women into the development process.

Our findings indicate that Senegalese women have always played a major agricultural role. However, Senegalese men may not emphasize this in their contact with westerners. There are a number of possible reasons for this. The Senegalese may communicate to the westerner what he perceives is expected and acceptable in western terms; his own sense of masculinity may play a role; his style of communication and perception of what is appropriate to communicate to different people may be a factor. In addition, Islam is a powerful force in Senegalese culture and strongly circumscribes the status of the woman. This will present a considerable obstacle to integrating women into development at the attitudinal level as well as at the functional level.

Cultural and religious values are intimately interwoven with the perception of motherhood as essential to a woman, the organization of the family (the extended family, not the western nuclear family), matters of health and nutrition, and modes of communication. The latter may be a particularly important area

of adjustment for the westerner. The Senegalese's style, rhythm, substance and channels of communication differ from those of the westerner. When and how something is communicated are often more important than what is communicated. And the negative effect of Islam on the Senegalese woman's communicativeness is an obstacle in all four subject areas discussed in this study.

Haiti: Synopsis

The Haiti section stresses the matrifocal nature of family life but emphasizes that the peasant Haitian woman does not derive power from her central (matrifocal) position in the family so much as an oppressive burden of responsibility. The following points ought to be considered in integrating Haitian women into the development process:

- The peasant Haitian family and household bears little resemblance to the western nuclear family unit. Legal marriage in early adult life is the exception rather than the rule among members of the peasant class. Common-law unions, many offspring, and multiple "wives" are features of Haitian conjugality. Households are often composed of extended family members. "Family" is more important than marriage. Many women are sole heads of households, including grandmothers.
- Motherhood is highly valued and barrenness is unacceptable. Catholicism tends to discourage contraception and Haitian men and women tend to conform submissively to authority.
- The Haitian woman plays an important role in agriculture, though it does not appear that her status is positively affected as a result. Haitian market women, however, are often economically independent and quite successful. Many women grow and sell food.
- The deplorable health situation of Haitian men, women, and children is exacerbated by voodoo superstition, the fatalism of Catholicism, fear of western practices, and a general attitude of submissiveness and docility.

Family and Household Structure; the Woman, Sole Head of Household:

The anthropological literature concerning lower class Haitian family and household composition demonstrates the differences and similarities between African and Haitian family structure. The maternal household, unstable conjugal unions, and "illegal" offspring are all emphasized as features of the Haitian family.

"Plaçage," the Haitian form of illegal conjugal union, whereby a man may have several wives is strongly represented in our findings. The acceptability of plaçage and the attitudes among members of the lower class toward marriage are reflected in a number of literary and analytic works.

The importance of the extended family, child mobility, and serial marriages are all emphasized as elements of household composition and the Haitian perception of family. In addition, the grandmother-headed household is a factor, as reflected in our sources.

Many literary images of women, sole heads of households reveal lives of unending work, deprivation, illness, and maternal self-sacrifice. They also demonstrate the matrifocal nature of Haitian society.

Question of Motherhood; the Value of Children; Work; Literary works illustrate the economic and spiritual value of children, as well as the unacceptability of barrenness. The parallels to African culture in this area are evident. Superstition and the influence of Catholicism are represented as forces encouraging the birth of many children and discouraging the use of contraceptive measures.

The mysteriousness with which pregnancy and childbirth are regarded, and the primitive conditions in which poor, rural women often give birth are reflected in both the imaginative and analytic literature. The close relationship between the Haitian mother and child, similar to that between the African mother and child, is emphasized as well.

The connection between the value of children and work is stressed in our findings. In addition, the image of the Haitian woman as

a docile, indefatigable laborer is illustrated by literary and analytic examples. The interdependence of women in the area of work is reflected as well.

Health: The miserable health situation of Haiti is stressed in both the imaginative and analytic literature: arid soil, poverty, poor diet, ubiquitous disease, lack of medical facilities are some of the concrete factors emphasized. Superstition, ignorance, and fear are the attitudinal factors indicated as contributing to and exacerbating the continuing status quo of extremely poor health among lower class Haitians.

HAITI

In our discussions of Ghanaian and Senegalese women, we referred frequently to the tradition of matriarchy and matriliney. We pointed out that customary law was matrilineal as was the organization of the family. However, because the dominant traditional cultural values on which matriarchy was based in Africa were discredited in the new world, matriarchy as an institution did not survive.

The lives of slaves in the new colonies was such that any reliable social arrangement was precluded. Families were repeatedly and often intentionally separated by slave owners and dealers, and formal marriage among slaves was discouraged.¹ Slave women were the concubines and mistresses of their masters and often the children resulting from these unions represented to their mothers by their lighter skins the hope of a free future.² In short, a number of reasons were given for the slave woman and man to aspire to white society, which was not in the least matriarchal.

In addition, the subsequent turbulent course of Haitian history worked against any pattern of formal marriage. No legal sanctions were imposed on "common-law" unions, and, in general, economic survival superceded all considerations of social form.³ As James Leyburn wrote in The Haitian People, "...he [the Haitian man] is no more a patriarch than his woman is a matriarch; they are common partners in a struggle for existence."⁴

However, if we cannot speak of matriarchy, we can speak of the "matrifocality" (the centrality of the woman and mother as the stable, supportive family figure) of Caribbean culture. Some social scientists explain the matrifocal quality of Caribbean family life as a cultural transfer from African matriarchy; others insist that matrifocality is the result of indigenous social and cultural forces.⁵ Essentially, the argument is that of cultural heredity versus cultural environment. It would seem that both are factors.

In view of the fact that the peasant masses of Haiti comprise over 90% of the total population⁶ and the women just over 50%,⁷ it is remarkable that the law reflects little of the reality of the peasant woman's life. While the image of the woman in the legal code presumes the security of a middle or lower middle-class life, the actual well-being of the peasant woman is jeopardized daily. Legislators, it appears, have not yet come to terms with the peasant level of society. Indeed, Leyburn believes the Haitian class division so strident as to call the classes "castes": "They are as different as day from night, as nobleman from peasant. ..." And, "The distinction between castes on the basis of occupation is nowhere more clearly seen than in the feminine sphere. The peasant woman, from childhood onward, is an indefatigable laborer...." ⁸

On the other hand, some scholars believe that the Haitian peasant woman has evolved for herself and children positive means of independence and even "autonomy" in the face of constant uncertainty.

This is the view expressed by Roger Bastide, an anthropologist writing about the black woman in the new world and her link with African traditions supportive of female independence.⁹ We shall refer to his argument below.

The image of the woman in contemporary Haitian imaginative literature is culturally multi-faceted. One can almost feel beneath the surface the criss-crossing of all the cultural forces that have gone into the making of the Haitian--African, Spanish, Indian, French, and even some American (because of the Occupation). More explicitly, she is portrayed as the sole and persevering bread-winner, the obedient and submissive wife, the authoritarian mother, the beast of burden, the epitome of womanly beauty and grace, the harbinger of traditional and religious values, and so on. The one universal aspect of the image of the lower class woman's life is that of dire poverty, which in the literature is linked with matrifocality in both a positive as well as negative way.

I. FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE: THE WOMAN, SOLE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

The following discussion of the analytic literature concerning Haitian family and household forms will serve as background and supplement to the literary images of Haitian women. Our discussion pertains to the lower class--rural and urban; in other works, to the peasant "caste" as Leyburn has labeled this group, which is usually illiterate, agriculturally based, highly superstitious, and generally very poor.

Melville Herskovits, eminent anthropologist, Africanist, and authority on Haitian culture, described what he termed the "reinterpretation" of the African family in the new world.¹⁰ The form of the typical African polygamous family--one man living in a compound with his several wives and their children, each group inhabiting a separate house--was in effect destroyed during slavery. (However, other anthropologists have described a Haitian compound after the period of slavery as very closely resembling the former African compound.)¹¹

Herskovits emphasized that after emancipation, the maternal household, which had persisted during slavery, continued to dominate the social system. Because the western insistence on monogamy and legal marriage negated the social acceptability of polygamy, it took the form, among newly freed slaves and their descendents, of many "illegal" unions and offspring, highly unstable marriages, and the importance of the mother (matrifocality) in the family.¹² Herskovits and Bastide remark on the persistence of the traditional independence of the African woman, who cares for herself and her children under the best and worst of circumstances.¹³ Although these typically illegal

and casual unions may last a lifetime and be built on great devotion between the man and woman, Herskovits remarks that the father should be regarded as only the "accidental companion of the mother."¹⁴ He may at any time leave her, or she him. As Leyburn emphasizes, "the family is as important an element of peasant life as formal marriage is unimportant."¹⁵

"Plaçage" (plasaj in Creole) is the name given to the kind of informal marriage in which the majority of Haitian peasants live. It is a form compatible with their social and economic needs and it is preferred to legal marriage, although, because of the prestige attached to legal and religiously sanctioned marriage, this is the ideal to which both sexes aspire for their later years, and perhaps for their children.¹⁶ In his classic work on Haiti, Life in a Haitian Valley, Herskovits defines plaçage as an institution "wherein a man and a woman who desire to live together fulfill certain obligations and perform certain ceremonies at the home of the girl's parents, after which the new household is established."¹⁷ (Occasionally, the girl continues to live at home although she is placée;¹⁸ this resembles the "extra-residential" or "visiting" conjugal arrangement which we shall mention in the Jamaican section.) Herskovits emphasizes the seriousness with which plaçage unions are regarded and the importance of the two families' approval of the union. It is of course easier to break a plaçage union than to break a marriage, and a man may have several plaçage wives, with children by each. One of the obvious reasons for this is economic. If he owns several plots of land

land geographically spaced, a wife and children are of great help to him in working each of these plots.¹⁹ In addition, plaçage wives enhance the social status of the peasant, representing a form of wealth.²⁰ (We saw this perception of polygamy in the Senegalese section.) Just as a man may have several wives, a woman may have more than one husband--but serially, not simultaneously.²¹

Leyburn gives the following reasons why the majority of Haitian peasants prefer plaçage to legal marriage: It is a time-honored practice... a wedding is likely to cause a great disturbance of daily routine and a measure of jealousy on the part of those who have not made the display; suspicion of legal documents and civil officials; expense of the license, of the church ceremony, the reception, the clothes; legal marriage interferes with entering into second and third unions later.²²

In Jacques Stephen Alexis' beautiful novel, Compère Général Soleil, a young couple are placé:

What need had they of an official of the state which all their lives had ignored their needs and sufferings. The workers of Haiti came together and were "placés," but they did not marry. Because the state is not the state of the people, the official religion is not the religion of their class, because their heart is purer than the morning dew. Their profound and human consciousness was their civil code and their act of marriage.²³

The novel indicates that the community not only sanctions plaçage but blesses it bountifully, celebrates it heartily, and hopes for children to be born soon. At the same time, there are traces of an apologetic tone--as to why there is no civil marriage, why no church wedding. The answer is not a rational

one, but a spiritual one. In the marriage described above, the narrator says that the God the people love from the depths of their hearts is pleased by this union and he is a God who does not chant in Latin.

Just as the above literary passage explains why a Haitian man prefers plaçage, anthropologist Roger Bastide explains why the woman prefers it. In his view, the unmarried Caribbean mother enjoys a social autonomy similar to that which her ancestors knew in Africa. As long as it is not sealed by law, Bastide says, a woman's sexual union with a man tends to be an unwritten contract of reciprocal financial aid. If he does not fulfill his responsibility in this regard, she is free to leave him, taking her children, and find a more satisfying relationship. (This is a very optimistic view of the husbandless woman; Jamaican sociologists, as will be discussed in the following section, see her "autonomy" as a liability.) In this way, Bastide maintains, the woman may enter into the unions she pleases as well as maintain control over her home and children. (Bastide also believes that the machismo of the black man in the new world developed as a compensatory response to his position of economic impotence, and that the black woman, the object of this male psycho-sexual pattern, was even further motivated to preserve her independence from her male counterpart.)²⁴

Given the dominant occurrence of plaçage over marriage, the open-ended nature of plaçage, the mobility of adults and children (migrating for economic reasons), and the presence of matrifocality, what is the composition of the Haitian household?

First and most simply, the household may consist of a placé man and woman with their children. In addition, there may be one or more children of the man and/or the woman by a former union, or unions. Sisters, brothers, cousins, and aunts may live with the placé couple either as visitors, because they are employed in the area, or because they can no longer be kept at home. If the daughter of a couple gives birth to a child and does not establish her own household, that child may be reared by its grandmother along with her own younger children, and the infant's mother may leave in order to find work in the town, or elsewhere. If the man of the house is absent or nonexistent, the household will then be headed by the grandmother. Thus, an extended family household is created.²⁵

"The peasant consults his elders about everything he does."²⁶ This Haitian adage was referred to by Herskovits in discussing the importance of the extended family among Haitian peasants. He wrote:

The Africans who peopled Haiti, coming from cultures where descent is counted solely on the side of the mother or the father, and coming into contact with the French, whose custom binds children with equal strength to the families of both parents, molded both traditions into the social forms found today...throughout the Republic.²⁷

Because social and economic conditions in Haiti have changed, the extended family has perhaps become more the ideal than the actuality. In an article in Conjonction in 1974, Jeanne G. Sylvain expressed concern about the weakening of extended family solidarity due to increasing immigration in search of work.²⁸ Many men go to the Dominican Republic, leaving

the mother alone with her children. (The Dominican Republic has for years employed Haitian migrant laborers.) Often the mother (or grandmother) travels from market to market, staying away from her family for long periods of time. Or, she migrates to the city with her children where they are cut off from a supportive and protective kinship system of any meaningful kind.

Both Jeanne Sylvain and Madeleine Bouchereau point out the high incidence of child mobility,²⁹ another aspect of the household composition in Haiti. Often children are "placed" outside the immediate family home with relatives or friends while they attend school, with older relatives who have offered to care for them in exchange for young company, or they are placed in positions of servitude with families of higher socio-economic standing in the same area or at some distance from the parental home. Sylvain emphasizes the traumatizing effect this kind of separation has on children, saying that many of them in Port-au-Prince fall into habits of truancy and theft.³⁰ Often these children are maltreated. The main character in Jacques Stephen Alexis' Compère Général Soleil recalls having been placed with a wealthy family. He was poorly fed, overworked, beaten and greatly missed his mother's care and affection. In addition, his sister, he recalls, was "placed" as well and returned home at the age of fourteen pregnant, having been sexually coerced by the father of the well-to-do family with whom she lived.³¹

Thus, through child mobility a household may include children related neither to the mother nor the father (if both are present). The household may also include grandparents or be headed by a grandmother.

Households are indeed matrifocal, although when we say that a household is headed solely by a woman, we do not necessarily mean to imply that there is no man in her life. She may be in a place union with a man who has another or other wives, and he may attend to her little, if at all. Based on her research among Haitian peasant market women, Caroline Legerman made this observation:

...these women are largely responsible for the economic support of their children. None of the women have men living with them in the city; four of the 17 are still in some kind of union with a man, for three I have no information, but the other 10 are no longer in any kind of union. ... those with young children claim to have some kind of arrangement with a man whom they call 'husband,' but even in these instances, at least one 'husband' contributes very little to the children's economic support.³²

Typically, then, the children from a woman's unions regard her as the parent and her home as their home. So it is easy to see how, even if a woman does have a "man in her life," she is for all intents and purposes the sole head of her household. We would hypothesize that it is very rare for a woman not to be in some kind of union with a man for long periods at a time, even though the support she receives from him is negligible. And she will continue, typically, to have children, in spite of poverty, for reasons we will discuss below.

Thus, the possible compositions of the Haitian peasant household are multiple. We can understand why Leyburn insists so adamantly on the family being as important as formal marriage is unimportant. We can also see the centrality of the woman and mother in Haitian culture and life, as it is principally she who sustains whatever continuity is possible when, in addition, the basics of daily life cannot be taken for granted.

Moreover, not only her position in the society but her self-perception has undoubtedly been influenced by the man's. Given the demoralization he has faced through unemployment and underemployment, given the role reversal in the home and the concomitant pattern of machismo, what repercussions has the Haitian woman had to cope with socially, economically and psychologically? It is hypothesized that this is an important question in the lives of the present-day Haitian women, as well as other Caribbean women.

Women who are sole household heads figure significantly in the Haitian literature surveyed for this study. They are women whose "husbands" have died, have gone away to work, have abandoned them, or who never really took up the role of husband and father in the first place. Some are older women, grandmothers. The most striking image of the women as sole head is that of Lamerchie in Fils de misère by Marie-Thérèse Colimon, one of Haiti's leading writers and an important figure in women's rights there. The novel was the recipient of the Prix France-Haiti literary award in 1973.

Lamercie Mercurieu had come to Port-au-Prince from Roche-à-Bateau, her little village in the south, at the age of sixteen with a distantly related aunt who wanted to expose her to urban "civilization" and help her find work. In the midst of a tumultuous Mardi-Gras celebration, Lamercie is raped by a man whose face she never clearly sees or voice hears. Nine months later she gives birth to a child who is sickly and dies soon thereafter. Lamercie next enters a *plaçage* union with a man, a market porter, but for long years she is unable to conceive, and finally, devastated by her barrenness, she separates from the man accusing him of not being able "to make her a mother." Alone, she takes up work as the maid servant of a wealthy mulatto family of Port-au-Prince. During an Easter holiday, she visits her home village in the south, and when she returns to Port-au-Prince, she is pregnant. But she has no idea who the father is--having met with a number of men while at home--and it seems quite unimportant. It is implied that having the child was all that mattered. Nine months later, Ti Tonton, baptised Jean-Léon, becomes the absolute center of Lamercie's life. She is determined to protect and cherish him, at all costs, and make him a man, an "important person."

At first, Lamercie brings the infant to work with her, but her mistress objects and so she leaves him first with a cousin and later with a seven-year-old "gârdô" (a child who "guards" or cares for younger ones in the absence of their mothers) at home.

The child is often ill because he usually has too little to eat, and Lamerchie fears every day that she will come home from work to find him very ill or dead. But miraculously, she believes, he survives and grows.

Having absorbed a sense of the importance of education while working for the Ledestin family, Lamerchie is determined to see Ti Tonton educated. At the age of five he is enrolled in school, and from that day forward, the ideal of her son's education elicits sacrifice after sacrifice in the life of Lamerchie. Because her salary is not enough to feed and clothe Ti Tonton properly each day for school and pay her rent, he eats poorly and Lamerchie often not at all. "Eating, eating, the constant poignant necessity!" And the child, understanding is quick to say, "'I'm not very hungry, no mama'," his big eyes and flat stomach belying his words."³³

The first crushing blow comes when Lamerchie is dismissed from her job by Madame Ledestin, who has become tempermental with another pregnancy. How to feed Ti Tonton and at all costs keep him in school! Resourcefully, Lamerchie sets up a stand at the early morning market, dishing out a popular hot breakfast cereal called "l'acassan." From five in the morning until two in the afternoon she is at this post. She returns in the early evening in order to sell fried fish and potatoes, having procured them at the warf in the afternoon, and returns home only at eleven at night. She is a "brave, valiant woman," says an old man of Cour Ravette, the slum where she and her son live. "No, I'd even go further," he says; "this is not a woman, this woman is a man!"³⁴

Lamercie continues these long hours, traveling from market to market, becoming increasingly successful, until she contracts malaria and almost dies. She recovers, but is greatly weakened, and, having lost her place at market and all her capital, must turn to yet another form of work. Intermittantly she is arrested, having stolen a chicken in the busy marketplace; frail and undernourished herself, she had become obsessed with giving Ti Tonton, her growing boy, a good meal. Finally, she becomes a washerwoman, taking in laundry, washing it in the river, and pressing it in her small shack. At last Ti Tonton, who has learned to read and write, to his mother's great pride and the amazement of the residents of Cour Ravette, is about to receive his certificate of studies. He is seventeen years old and becoming a man. But one day Lamercie is caught up in a confrontation between soldiers and students just outside the school; fearing that her son will be injured, she advances toward the school against the warning of an armed soldier. He shoots and she falls dead into the arms of a friend. The pathos of this novel, capped by its ending, contrasts with other stories of women, sole household heads whose children die, for example "Just To Buy Corn," discussed in the Ghana section. Lamercie's unnecessary death at the hands of an angry soldier reinforces the theme of self-sacrifice so typical of the single mother's life--in Ghana, Senegal, and elsewhere.

As suggested above, Ti Tonton's father never appears in the novel, and Lamercie forms no union with a man during the

years of her son's rearing. As stated, this is unusual. But it serves the purpose in this novel of emphasizing the solitary struggle that is life for the Haitian peasant mother, sole head. When a relative from the south, Ti Tante, comes to live and work with Lamerchie, she counsels the flirtatious thirteen-year-old girl to avoid men for the present:

As long as you are patient you will find an honest man who will make you his placée or, who knows, even his wife. Look at me, all alone with my child, I struggle day and night. If I had a companion, I'd work less. Believe me, my child, it's always better to settle in with one man.³⁵

This quote is important as it reveals the ideal conjugal union in the mind of Lamerchie, her desire for security, the perception of men as "dishonest," and the tendency of young women not "to settle in with one man," but to drift from union to union.

There are other references to mothers without husbands in the novel, and it is implied that they are numerous. One such woman says:

When the child is born, we don't even know where to put him, don't have the time to take care of him, nothing to give him to eat. Staying at home to pamper the baby, that's for married ladies. But us, we must work, go to the market every day, sell our stuff. If we don't, how will we feed the children and ourselves?³⁶

Another novel entitled "L'Amour Oui; La Mort, Non," by Liliane Devieux-Dehoux, describes a mother of eight children who is and has always been the sole household head. The father, she says, has never given her or the children anything, never shown any interest in their well-being. But, "thanks to God, I've raised them all, doing as best I can myself."³⁷ The author

emphasizes the class separation in Haiti. The heroine of the novel, an upper-class young woman studying medicine, is horrified at the poverty she sees in a Port-au-Prince slum where the mother described above lives. She reacts to it as if she had never imagined it existed in her country.

In Fonds-des-Nègres by Marie Chauvet,³⁸ a young woman goes to live with her grandmother in the mountains because her mother has gone abroad to work as a maid. Life in the rural village of Fonds-des-Nègres is particularly difficult for the young woman who finds her grandmother's superstitious and primitive ways depressing. She feels trapped in a life of deprivation that has no relief and no escape. The villagers, it seems, accept their fate.

Other literary pieces present almost a snap-shot image of the solitary mother: the bone-thin woman, her haggard, sad face drained of blood, begging her bread while holding a sickly baby in her arms.³⁹

Thus, the life of the sole head of household, the "house" typically consisting of a one-room shack constructed of old cardboard or discarded shipping crates, "a single room where six people sleep,"⁴⁰ eat, recover from illnesses, or die.

II. QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD; THE VALUE OF CHILDREN; AND WORK

Much as in African culture, children and motherhood are valued for both economic and spiritual reasons. Economic: they provide additional hands in the fields as well as at home doing women's work. In Fils de misère, Lamercie thinks how unique Ti Tonton will be in going to school. Other children work from a very early age, doing all the tasks of adults.

Young girls, well before seven years of age, are in charge of younger brothers and sisters. ...and children of neighbors. As soon as the mother has left for market, the young girl prepares the pap, feeds it to the infants, carrying them in her arms, washing them sometimes (though rarely, it is true), and puts them to sleep. The little ones hardly know their real mother, sleeping at dusk before she arrives home, awaking in the morning after she has left....These young girls go in the early morning to get water at the fountain, light the fire, peel the bananas and potatoes, do the dishes.⁴¹

And Lamercie thinks equally of those who work alongside their mothers at the market, in the hot sun, selling foodstuffs. Other children offer their services as porters. She thinks how this "brutal contact with reality," working from early in the morning until late at night, leads young, quickly maturing girls into trouble. This image of children working is reminiscent of the Ghanaian images of children who must work in order to eat. Also, just as Dankwaa in "Water's Edge" (Ghana) was given by her parents to another family as a servant, children in Haiti are often, as mentioned above, placed by their parents as servants in other families. The rural children, of course, work as well: boys and girls with their parents

in the fields, carrying heavy loads, and always doing household tasks, minding younger children, selling at market.⁴² Thus, Haitian children are important to the family because of their economic contributions.

Children are valued also for spiritual reasons: "It's the good God who gives them,"⁴³ says a woman in Fonds-des-Nègres. Children are a source of prestige for a man as well as a mother, according to Herskovits and Bouchereau,⁴⁴ and because regarded as a gift of God, great consternation is created when no children are forthcoming. In Haiti as in Africa, barrenness is regarded as a curse. Herskovits wrote:

A childless woman first goes to a vodun priest, to have him determine by divination if a co-wife has not invoked magic against her. If her question receives an affirmative answer, she acquires a "counter-charm" to offset the effect of the other woman's magic. Should such a charm be ineffective, she would offer her prayers before the shrines of the saints and make pilgrimages....⁴⁵

In Les Arbres Musiciens by Jacques Stephen Alexis, a woman named Mayotte is childless. She "wore in her eyes the anguish of her empty womb....a half-woman, with half-joys, and a half-happiness."⁴⁶ It is as if something has died in Mayotte: the child has died in not being born, and, in a sense, she too has died. This corresponds to the African belief, mentioned in the Ghana section, that the presence of the unborn is intensely felt. The woman is so regarded as the potential mother than when she is barren, she is thought of as having failed to bring forth the child who was waiting to be born.

Thus, barrenness is perceived as being an unnatural state.

Similarly, in Fils de misère, Lamercie believes herself cursed because she cannot conceive.

...her womb remained unfertile, like a field ravaged by a cyclone, yielding only nettles. ... Shame, shame and affliction in the eyes of the neighboring women! Was she a he-mule, my God? What crime had she committed to deserve such a punishment? What penance should she then perform? Who had caused this cruel humiliation?⁴⁷

Note the agricultural metaphor at the beginning of the quote; we have discussed the connection between motherhood and food production at length earlier. Also, note the repetitive idea of barrenness as sin and illness, which we have also seen in the African works. Lamercie offers prayers and lights candles to the catholic saints as well as to the voodoo divinities. (See Herskovits above.) She asks her ancestors for relief and prays to African deities, but still she does not conceive. The value of children, the prestige attached to them, and the rebuke of the community upon a childless woman: all these factors bring to mind the idea advanced by psychoanalyst Karen Horney concerning childlessness in cultures where womanhood is equated with motherhood.

Unlike the African custom of spacing children by means of conjugal abstinence during breast feeding, Haitian women, wrote Herskovits (in 1936), do not space children and "pregnancies follow in rapid succession." He added that contraceptive methods are based on superstition; for example, a man places a grain of salt on his tongue during intercourse.⁴⁸ Similarly, a study done in 1962 on "Haitian Attitudes Toward

Family Size" revealed that "whatever number of children God sends is the right number" was the generally shared attitude among Haitian peasant men and women. Similarly, "God gives the poor people many children"; and a woman shouldn't take contraceptives, "...that's against God if she's not sick."⁴⁹ This attitude strongly resembles the Catholic Church's categorical condemnation of contraception. So this too is a factor superimposed on the traditional Afro-Haitian value accorded childbearing.

Once a woman has conceived, she continues to protect herself against outside evil spirits. The state of pregnancy is regarded with awe. Herskovits told this story:

A pregnant woman has privileges and powers not shared with other women, as was evidenced when a Haitian man once appeared with his eye half shut, explaining that the sty was a punishment for his refusal to buy something his pregnant spouse had coveted. 'They do not always know they are sending you a sty, but it is a power they have,' he made clear.⁵⁰

Similarly, the entire course of pregnancy is filled with rites and at childbirth itself, "the placenta is buried in a special hole dug in the room where the birth occurred...."⁵¹ (Recall the same Senegalese custom described in "Cradle of Humanity.")

A scene in Les Arbres Musiciens describes the death of a woman in childbirth. Reine is surrounded by many of the elder women of the village, one vigorously massaging her stomach, urging her to "push," others mixing herbal drinks and feeding them to her, and the head mid-wife touching her

from time to time on the buttocks with a hot firebrand to provoke a reaction. Finally Reine dies. But the vaudou priest, Bois d'Orme, alone with the dead woman, manages to deliver the child who is still alive. He is regarded as having accomplished the miraculous, and his ultimate authority in matters of health is reaffirmed.⁵²

Still other women tell of having delivered their children alone, on the side of the road, having cut the umbilical cord with a rough stone, remounted the donkey and proceeded home.⁵³ They do not stop their work even in anticipation of imminent delivery and are up again the next day to continue.

Thus a combination of the beliefs that all children come from God, that a barren woman is a cursed woman, a "half-woman," that ancestors and therefore continuity are important forces in one's life explain the high value accorded motherhood and childbirth.

At the same time, the occurrence of abandoned children indicates the ambivalence the poor, single mother feels toward yet another birth. In Fils de misère, Lamerchie remembers the mother who fled the hospital maternity ward, leaving the newborn behind. So, while children are fundamentally valued in this culture, they can be "valued" only reservedly when their birth exacerbates an already impossible burden.

As in Senegalese literature, the image of the close and continuing relationship between mother and child is a strong one. In Les Arbres Musiciens, the narrator comments, "How sensual the mutual love between a mother and her child!"⁵⁴ And in Jacques

Roumain's novel, Masters of the Dew, the old woman Delira tells her son who has just returned from a long stay in Cuba where he was a laborer, "Maybe I talk nonsense, but for me, you see, you are still my little boy, and when you were away and I waited for you, I felt a weight just below my heart as if I still carried you in my womb; it was the weight of sorrow, ah, Manual, what sorrow I felt...."⁵⁵ This quote is so remarkably similar to the section in Sembene Ousmane's Ô Pays, Mon Beau Peuple! in which Rokhaya expresses almost identical feelings to her son Oumar (see Senegal section) that one wonders if Roumain's novel, published some ten years earlier, was not known to Sembene when he wrote Ô Pays. In any case, the two stories have much in common and the interrelationship is an interesting one.

WORK

It is valid to link the discussions of motherhood and work because in the life of the Haitian mother the two are closely allied. We have already seen that children work hard from an early age alongside or supplementing their mother's work and that childbirth often occurs as part of a long workday for a peasant woman who gives birth alone in a field or on the roadside returning from market. (Leyburn mentions this too.)⁵⁶ And we have seen that the mother works unendingly to support her children, often leaving them alone to fend for themselves, and continues to have children as they are "gifts from God," and then must work still harder, and so the cycle goes.

Because the lower class Haitian woman does not know leisure, images of her working are everywhere. Leyburn writes, "The rule of life in country districts is unremitting labor for the female from childhood up."⁵⁷ She cooks, makes clothes, labors in the fields, does family washing in the nearest stream, carries water, does housework, goes to market sometimes daily to buy and sell. Often she sleeps in the market at night-- it may be as far as twenty miles from her home--in order to be there early in the morning for business. Young children who accompany her may have to be carried,⁵⁸ and the roads she travels are usually uneven, dirt roads. If she is the *placée* wife, as mentioned above, she is usually mainly if not solely responsible for herself and her children. Leyburn adds:

By our standards, the woman is inferior to the man not only in rights but in being one spouse of several. He may contract several unions, while she may have only one. She does as steady, if not more actual, physical labor than the man. When he is at home, she must offer him the best of food. ...Customary behavior is followed without much question.⁵⁹

Leyburn quotes the accounts of observers of Haiti as far back as 1837:

The females are compelled to perform most of the labor. Those of the country employ themselves in cultivating the soil, while the men spend their time in traversing the country on horseback, in drinking, smoking, and other habits equally unprofitable.⁶⁰

(This remark recalls the passages from the Ghanaian novel Two Thousand Seasons discussed in the first section. Leyburn quotes another observer from the turn of the century:

The women are the best part of the nation. They are splendid, unremitting toilers. In the face of all discouragement...the women of Haiti remind one of certain patient types of ant or termite, who, as fast as you destroy their labor of months or days, hasten to repair it with unslackening energy. ... They cannot stop to reason, but must go on working from three years old to the end of their lives. ...⁶¹

In Les Arbres Musiciens, a man watches a group of women washing clothes in the stream: "...No false modesty or fear in these women, real Haitian peasant women!...The rugged life of the fields teaches them everything. No pretense here, real women with real hearts, hardy at work as in love, as faithful as you could hope for, but willful too!"⁶²

The strength and interdependence of women working together, as seen in the African works, is also a feature of Haitian working women. As mentioned above, Lamerchie in Fils de misère takes in a young relative from the country. 'Ti Tante works

alongside Lamerchie in the market and is a great help to her. Both Sidney Mintz and Caroline Legerman have written about the expertise in the use of capital and the daring of the Haitian peasant market woman as well as the rights, duties, and mutual support fulfilled by kinship ties in the market woman's work.⁶³ For example, a woman can borrow money without interest from her aunt or sister; they can rely on each other in times of illness. They protect each other because "they love one another." (This kinship pattern in the market situation is strongly reminiscent of the grandmother/granddaughter bond as seen in the Ghanaian novel The Ashanti Doll.)

Roger Bastide, mentioned above, views the independent nature of the marketwoman's life as providing an economic freedom from men, an "autonomy," and explains it as a pattern transferred from West Africa.⁶⁴ But this, as will be discussed in the Jamaica section, is a highly optimistic view of the Caribbean woman's life, one which many of the literary images challenge.

For example, a hard-working woman in Les Arbres Musiciens is killed by her husband one night when he is drunk; he cuts her throat. She had worked as a washerwoman, and he spent her money on liquor. But she loved and cherished him, worked for and forgave him. The narrator comments, "To think that mothers raise their daughters...in the respect and admiration of the man, their master, as if they were dogs, to serve, to lick their boots!"⁶⁵

The list is endless of the women who age prematurely because of unending work, insufficient sleep, poor diets, numerous pregnancies, often by men passing through who never return.

As we have pointed out, there are images of women who are "hardy and willfull" as well as of those who are obedient and submissive. Some women speak to their men as if they were in fact slaves. In Masters of the Dew, a young woman promises her future placé husband that she will be "the servant of [his] house."⁶⁶ Similarly, a Haitian folktale entitled "The Fable of Tatez' o-Flando"⁶⁷ tells of a woman, mother of three boys, whose husband treats her brutally, beating her every night and ordering her to bring him food and wash his feet. She obeys him to the minutest detail and tells the oldest son, who wants to protect her, that his father is a good "père de famille " (a good provider), and so no complaint should be made. She is deeply grateful, it seems, for his contribution. The children are terrified of their father: he is the embodiment of threatening authority. The mother, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the loving, tender, beautiful and docile Woman.

We emphasize the attitude of docility and submissiveness of Haitian woman because it is so often commented on. It appears that the presence of the Catholic Church, the strict class division, and long years of oppressive military rule have made Haitians especially meek. (Jamaican women, as will be discussed, are not docile.) Interestingly, the turn-of-the-century observer of Haiti mentioned above remarked that the women were the hope and future of the country; if ever, he said, it stopped being cursed by "military despotism," the women could make it "one of the richest countries in the world for its size and population." ⁶⁸ Today, although it achieved independence in 1804, Haiti is regarded as the poorest of the developing countries.

IV. HEALTH

The health situation of the peasant class in Haiti, according to almost every writer mentioned so far, is very simply disastrous. Anything resembling a balanced diet is unheard of; for years it has not been customary, affordable, or forthcoming from the impoverished soil in regions that experience drought much as the Sahel in Africa. Two novels by Jacques Roumain, Masters of the Dew and La Montagne Ensorcelée⁶⁹ are about agricultural villages which have not seen rain for a long time. Having no other source of income, the villagers, especially the children, die of diseases caused by malnutrition. (They are described as eating insects and dirt.) Both novels emphasize the superstition and blind acceptance of fate which prevent the villagers from taking action to help themselves. Masters of the Dew, as title suggests, is about a young man who finds in the mountains the bubbling source of the dried up streams; he organizes a plan for irrigation. But he is alone in his enterprise. The other villagers regard his lack of passivity with a mixture of awe and disapproval. When he speaks to his old mother about the need to do something, she responds that his "words seem to be true, but maybe the truth is a sin."⁷⁰ Instead, she and the others pray to the vaudou gods and their ancestors, but no rain comes.

Just as barrenness is perceived as a curse and treated by a counter-curse, so, as in numerous African works, diseases such as typhoid fever are seen as "evil airs" and "treated" with herbs and fetishes and vaudou rites. In Compère Général

Soleil, the young hero is finally cured by regular medical treatments of his recurring epileptic seizures. He praises the power of medicine to his wife who replies that only God can cure, for he is the only master.⁷¹

In La Montagne Ensorcelée, the deaths of children and animals resulting from the drought are blamed on an old woman who lives somewhat apart from the others. She is said to be a witch, and in a frenzy of accumulated frustration and fear, the villagers stone her to death and behead her young daughter.

Roumain emphasizes in his novels the extent to which disease and deprivation have ravaged the Haitian peasant. According to Leyburn, the main diseases that plague Haiti are malaria, hookworm, yaws, tuberculosis, dysentery, enteritis, granular conjunctivitis. He speaks of bodies "perpetually full of malaria, ...lassitude sapping all energy."⁷² He writes of the health of the peasant woman as destroyed by the exertion of heavy load-carrying, flattening cranial bones, bending the spine, straining internal organs, pressuring the heart and lungs, leading to cardiac and pulmonary infections as well as chronic anemia. In addition, the absence of proper childbirth procedures, including sanitary delivery and rest afterwards, lessens resistance to disease and causes abdominal infections. Because work interferes with nursing her child, the mother introduces fruits and solids which cause nutritive diseases in the infant. In addition, Bouchereau writes that in the country it is common for the women and children to eat after the men, as in Africa.⁷³ Leyburn strongly suggests that the slowness of Haitians and the lack of progress in the country may be largely due to continuing disease, often invisible, but nonetheless incapacitating.

The imaginative literature reflects all of the above and emphasizes what is perceived as the lack of alternatives for the peasant whose soil is depleted, for the market woman who cannot make ends meet, for the mother who continues bearing children, as many as "God sends." Ignorance, a mistrust of western medicine, accompanied by a strong belief in evil curses and a reliance on a blend of Catholic and vaudou practices--these are some of the earmarks of the stagnant health situation in Haiti as portrayed in the literature.

Footnotes

- 1 James G. Leyburn, The Haitian People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 178, 177.
- 2 Leyburn, p. 178.
- 3 Ibid, pp. 182-3, 180.
- 4 Ibid, p. 197.
- 5 Melville Herskovits represents the former view, Franklin Frazier, the latter.
- 6 Leyburn, p. viii.
- 7 Demographic Yearbook 1974, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Office (New York: United Nations, 1975), p. 166.
- 8 Leyburn, pp. 4-5.
- 9 Roger Bastide, "The African Tradition in Black America and the Civilization of the Woman," The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975), pp. 122-23.
- 10 Melville J. Herskovits, "Le Noir Dans le Nouveau Monde," Présence Africaine, no. 8-9 (Mars. 1950), p. 352.
- 11 Sidney W. Mintz, "The Employment of Capital by Market Women in Haiti," a paper prepared for the 1960 Summer Symposia at Burg Wartenstein, Austria, pp. 3-4.
- 12 Herskovits, p. 352.
- 13 Ibid; Bastide, p. 122.
- 14 Herskovits, p. 353.

- 15
Leyburn, p. 198.
- 16
Melville J. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1964), p. 107; Bastide, p. 136. (Although Herskovits' study was originally published in 1936, it continues to be regarded as one of the authoritative works on the Haitian peasant class, in part because of the lack of continuing research in this area.)
- 17
Ibid, p. 105.
- 18
Ibid, p. 112.
- 19
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- 20
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- 21
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- 22
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- 23
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- 24
Bastide, pp. 136-37, 128.
- 25
Bouchereau, pp. 131-34; Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, pp. 122-3.
- 26
Herskovits, Life, p. 124.
- 27
Ibid, pp. 122-23.
- 28
Jeanne G. Sylvain, "Notes Sur la Famille Haitienne," Conjonction, no. 124 (août 1974), p. 31.

- 29
Ibid, p. 32; Bouchereau, p. 132.
- 30
Sylvain, p. 32.
- 31
Alexis, p. 43.
- 32
Caroline J. Legerman, "Kin Groups in a Haitian Market,"
MAN, no. 233 (October 1962), pp. 148-49.
- 33
Marie-Therese Colimon, Fils de misère (Port-au-Prince,
Editions Caraïbes, 1973), p. 51.
- 34
Colimon, p. 67.
- 35
Ibid, p. 69.
- 36
Ibid, p. 38.
- 37
Liliane Devieux-Dehoux, L'Amour, Oui; La Mort, Non (Ottawa:
Editions Naaman de Sherbrooke, 1976), p. 26.
- 38
Marie Chauvet, Fonds-des-Nègres (Port-au-Prince: Editions
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- 39
Celie Diaquoi Deslandes, "Ceux que J'aime," Chants du Coeur:
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- 40
Colimon, p. 39.
- 41
Ibid, pp. 28-9.
- 42
Ibid, pp. 32-3.
- 43
Chauvet, p. 104.
- 44
Herskovits, Life, p. 88; Bouchereau, p. 134.
- 45
Herskovits, Life, p. 120.

- 46 Jacques Stephen Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1957), p. 127.
- 47 Colimon, p. 18.
- 48 Herskovits, Life, p. 120.
- 49 J. Mayone Stycos, "Haitian Attitudes Toward Family Size," study supported by the Population Council, the Conservation Foundation, and the Cornell Social Science Research Center, July 1962.
- 50 Herskovits, Life, p. 89.
- 51 Ibid, p. 92.
- 52 Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, pp. 264-65.
- 53 Colimon, pp. 37-8.
- 54 Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, p. 53.
- 55 Jacques Roumain, Gouverneurs de la Rosée (Paris: Les Éditions Francais Reunis, 1946), pp. 109-10.
- 56 Leyburn, p. 197.
- 57 Ibid, p. 196.
- 58 Ibid, pp. 196-97,
- 59 Ibid, p. 197.
- 60 Ibid, p. 204.
- 61 Ibid, p. 201.
- 62 Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, p. 132.

- 63
Mintz; Legerman, see notes 11 and 32.
- 64
Bastide, p. 131.
- 65
Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, p. 57.
- 66
Roumain," p. 131.
- 67
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- 68
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- 69
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- 70
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Haiti: Conclusions

Our research on the perceptions of and about Haitian women as shown in the imaginative and analytic literature indicates a need for the American development specialist to sensitize himself to the cultural differences between Haitian and American women. The Haitian man's and woman's perceptions of her social role as well as the interpersonal dynamics between Haitian men and women determine how both Haitian men and women react to the development specialist trying to integrate women into the development process.

The Haitian woman's agricultural and work role, conjugal and familial role, health and nutrition role are all perceived according to the unique cultural values of Haiti as well as the circumstances of the Haitian peasant's life.

In all these areas, the style, substance, rhythm and channels of communication are important areas of adjustment for the American development specialist. The Haitian is inclined to be docile with and demure to those who represent authority to him. He may therefore communicate what he perceives will be acceptable to the American rather than present an objective, well-rounded picture of a question or problem. This, in addition to the cultural and religious forces in Haiti, is an important element in integrating Haitian women into the development process.

Jamaica: Synopsis

The Jamaica section demonstrates the matrifocal nature of family life but stresses that the lower-income Jamaican woman's familial and social position is not one of power but of acute insecurity and oppressiveness. (Matrifocality refers to the major familial role of the woman, often as the stable, supportive family figure.) In general, the following points merit consideration in integrating Jamaican women into the development process:

- The organization of the Jamaican family and household is unlike that of the Western nuclear unit. Conjugal unions, usually common-law, are unstable, the rate of illegitimacy is high, and the effectiveness of the spouse/father is minimal. Many households are headed by women--mothers and grandmothers. Extended family members play a major role in family and household dynamics. "Family" tends to be more equated with blood kin than with the conjugal mate.
- Women have children at an early age. The high value placed on female fertility and male virility is an important element in the perception of motherhood. The childless woman is ostracised.
- The agricultural role of Jamaican women has declined as many have migrated to urban areas, where rates of unemployment and underemployment are very high.

Rural women tend to be receptive to development assistance. They are industrious and take great pride in the food they produce. There is very great need of assistance in the agricultural sector. Conceivably women in the urban areas could be attracted back to the land.

- Folk medicine is regarded by many traditional Jamaican women as more reliable. It is attractive to them in that it is consistent with their general lifestyle and cultural values. There is great need of improved medical facilities for poor Jamaican women--urban and rural. There is also great need for education in this area.

Family and Household Structure; the Woman, Sole Head of Household:

Paralleling the Haiti findings, the anthropological literature concerning lower-class family and household composition emphasizes the maternal household, the instability of conjugal unions, and the high rate of illegitimacy. "Concubinage," the Jamaican counterpart to Haitian plaçage, is described, as well as other forms of mating--all represented as more or less acceptable to the lower-class Jamaican man and woman.

The extended family household, the grandmother-headed household, the disposition of children from serial unions, the complexity of kinship roles, and the high occurrence of the single mother-headed household are aspects of household and family structure emphasized in our findings. Anthropological and imaginative literary sources indicate that, as in Haiti and Africa, "family" in Jamaica is neither perceived nor organized as is the typical western nuclear family unit and that the dominance of the woman in the family is almost without exception, even when there is a man present. Recurring literary images reflect the social, economic, and conjugal insecurity of lower-class Jamaican women.

The phenomenon of the woman, sole household head is represented by a number of literary images of women who have too many children, little chance of employment, and whose men offer no support at all. Some images portray women who nearly work themselves to death to make ends meet; others reveal women who abandon their unwanted children or pass them on to female kin.

Question of Motherhood; the Value of Children; Work: The value placed on childbearing during slavery and the continuing perception

of the barren woman as an abomination are represented as major elements in the area of motherhood. The ambivalence of poor women toward their children is also reflected in literary images and factual data.

Journalistic and imaginative literature reviewed describes the deplorable work situation of the Jamaican lower-class woman, rural and urban. The effects on these women of the impoverishment of the agricultural sector, the rural-urban drift, the rise of urban unemployment and underemployment, prostitution, and crime are stressed in literary images as well as in film.

Health: We describe what we term the "relativity in the perception of well-being" as portrayed by images of women in the imaginative literature. A final literary image suggests the positive aspects of rural life as opposed to urban life for the Jamaica woman.

JAMAICA

Just as Haitian society cannot at any level be considered matriarchal, neither can Jamaican society.¹ It can, however, unquestionably be considered matrifocal.

Lucille Mathurin Mair, Jamaican scholar, writer, fighter for women's rights, currently Ambassador from Jamaica to Cuba, describes the double-edged-sword nature of the Jamaican woman's position in her article aptly entitled, "Reluctant Matriarchs." Within the "slave hierarchy," she says, the position of the black woman (to be distinguished from that of the mulatto woman) was sexually, familiarly, and economically one of oppression and exploitation, not of privilege and authority. And today, she continues, the situation of the black woman still reflects "the society's perception of women as workers without skills, reservoirs of cheap human power, always available for exploitation...."² (We hypothesize that this is true of Haitian women as well, although it was not expressed as strongly by the Haitian sources used in this study.)

Similarly, in a piece entitled "The Emerging Status of Jamaican Women," Peggy Antrogus, Director of the Women's Desk in Jamaica, writes:

Just over half the population of Jamaica is female. Nearly 46% of the total population according to the 1970 census is under 15 years of age. On both these counts there is every reason to suppose that women play a vital role in the society. In terms of their legal status, the majority of institutions and laws--with some significant exceptions--guarantee the equality of men and women. But while the laws and institutions proclaim equality,

the values, attitudes and practices of the whole society create a milieu in which women are considered to be subordinate, lacking in confidence, oppressed and in general, outside the main-stream of power and decision-making.³
[My ital.]

This situation is marvelously expressed by Louise Bennett, renowned Jamaican poet, comedienne, folk heroine: "All de while the woman dem free and de man dem nebber know it."⁴ And in a very different tone it is expressed by Myrna Bain in her prose-poem "Images":

I AM A BLACK WOMAN
THE MUSIC OF MY SONG
SOME SWEET ARPEGGIO OF TEARS
IS WRITTEN IN A MINOR KEY
AND I
CAN BE HEARD HUMMING IN THE NIGHT ...

In Slavery's time, an ended period that is still too much with us, our female ancestors knew, saw and felt things that no other women in the history of the world have had to know see or feel.

The distortions of our present lives, the grind to eat and exist gives us little time to discuss the past because now "ain't too swift, either." And the women can never improve faster than their total society. ...

This is a new day, however, and we cannot make too much of old things and people. Development, especially economic, is our crushing concern.

HERE ARE THE ASPHALT LAKE,
IRON MINES,
COFFEE PLANTATIONS,
PORT DOCKS, FERRY BOATS, TEN CENTS...
THIS IS A PEOPLE OF "ALL RIGHT,"
WHERE EVERYTHING IS ALL WRONG;
THIS, A PEOPLE OF "VERY WELL,"
WHERE NO ONE IS WELL.

Situations which make us say to our children:

WALK ALONG AND DON'T CRY, LITTLE BLACK GIRL,
GO ON OVER THERE;
WALK ALONG LITTLE BLACK GIRL, AND DON'T CRY.
COME ON OVER HERE;
WALK, LITTLE BLACK GIRL, WALK,
YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE COURAGE!⁵

And she continues, "There is much crying at home these days;
for things our poets and novelists saw decades ago plague
us still."⁶ As we see here and will see below, Jamaican
poets and novelists still see and portray these things.

I. FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE; THE WOMAN, SOLE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

In order to better understand the literary images of male-female relationships and of the woman, sole household head, an analysis of lower-class Jamaican family and household structure is useful. For this we turn to the anthropological literature on Jamaica. (The term "lower-class" refers to that level of society--urban and rural--which is very poor and in particular need of development assistance.)

In her classic anthropological work on the Jamaican family, aptly entitled My Mother Who Fathered Me, Edith Clarke meticulously describes all the variations in the lower-class Jamaican family and household. By drawing her data from research in three communities whose prevailing socio-economic characteristics differ significantly, she demonstrates that no easy generalization can validly be made about all lower-class Jamaican families and households. Their actual structure as well as the perceptions of the ideal family group vary from community to community and sometimes vary within a community according to socio-economic and ethnic factors. What one might expect to be the case often is not; for example, a very poor community may reveal a high rate of family stability, while another with a higher level of average income may reveal a lower rate of family stability. Economic factors, Clarke demonstrates, are not alone determinant.⁷

There are some generalizations that would hold for the lower-class strata of Jamaican society: "Family life is highly unstable, marriage rates are low, especially during the earlier phases of adult life, and illegitimacy rates have always been

high."⁸ [My ital.] As in Haiti, it is typical for peasant women, according to Clarke's findings, to marry in their forties or early fifties after having lived in a common-law union for many years. While "concubinage" (the Jamaican counterpart to Haitian *plaçage*) is not only acceptable but taken very seriously as a union, marriage is the ideal but perceived (by women) as "not within the woman's reach." Clarke records one marriage that "followed a concubinage of fourteen years during which six children were born." ⁹

Preceding the years of concubinage and/or marriage, young people typically begin their "mating career with extra-residential relations of varying duration and publicity. ... In this conjugal form [also recognized and sanctioned] the partners live apart with their separate kin while the man visits his mate and contributes to the support of her and their children. ... When these unions break down, the children usually remain with the unmarried mother or her kin." ¹⁰ (Elements of this form of mating are similar to the Ghanaian matrilineal marriage in which the husband and wife live with their respective matrikin. See Ghana section.) This is often the beginning of the three (or four) generational grandmother-headed household. Or, in such a case, the grandmother, in her early forties, may just be getting married while her adolescent daughter is beginning to have children. In addition, these children very likely never really know their father. The young girl may pass through other extra-residential unions before she eventually establishes a household based on

concubinage or marriage. (Clarke points out that the urban form of concubinage is often less permanent and less faithful than the rural form. ¹¹ This is evident in the novels, as discussed below.) A household may or may not include children from previous unions--"outside" children.

It should now be clear how rare in Jamaica, as in Haiti, the typical western nuclear family unit is. Even where a household is based on a mother, father and children, the inclusion of outside children or other kin distinguishes it greatly from the nuclear unit.

In addition to the "simple family type household consisting of a man and woman with or without their children and possibly adopted children [in addition to the outside children of the man and/or woman],"¹² Clarke also identifies the following household compositions in the three communities she researched:

- extended family households, being an extension of simple family by the addition of other kin;
- "denuded" family households, containing either a mother or a father, living alone with his or her children--these might be either simple or extended;
- single person households;
- sibling households.¹³

In the case of sole-head households surveyed in Clarke's study, the percentage of those headed by women was vastly greater (over 75% in each community) than those headed by men.¹⁴ A good number of these were extended family households, headed by, for example, grandmothers or great-grandmothers. Clarke analyzes in depth the grandmother household because of the importance of the grandmother, she says, "in all writings" on the Caribbean.¹⁵

When household composition is complex, kinship roles are too. Thus a child born to a girl of fifteen who lives with her mother may learn to call his grandmother "mother" and regard his real mother as a sibling. If his real mother leaves the household to live and work elsewhere, and his grandmother goes out to work, he may come to regard an aunt as his mother.¹⁶

Merle Hodge, a Trinidadian writer, has defined "family" as a "household, or a network of relationships (i.e. of people not necessarily living within the same four walls) encompassing children."¹⁷ She emphasizes the positive value of the extended family.

Many of the women surveyed in Clarke's study who were sole heads led lives of poverty and insecurity. They worked and earned what they could and were found to "seek for a partner"¹⁸ to relieve the burden of living. This is strongly reflected in the imaginative literature.

Clarke emphasizes that the child's most intimate relationship, even when the father is present, is with his mother; feelings between father and child are often strained and ambivalent. It is a fact that the mother/child relationship is often "the only stable [one] in the child's life."¹⁹ Thus the title of Clarke's book, My Mother Who Fathered Me, taken from a passage in George Lamming's In The Castle of My Skin in which the father is referred to as the man "who had only fathered the idea of me [and] left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me...."²⁰ Similarly, a poem entitled "Salute to a Jamaican Woman" by Pamela Beshoff

includes these lines:

On a dark day
You are the one bright spot.
Generation upon another
You have been breadwinner,
Father, mother. ²¹

The images of lower-class women in the Jamaican novel reveal the enormous strain and conflict that exist between men and women, as well as between each of them and the society at large. It is this two-fold strain and conflict that is both cause and effect of the fragility of conjugal unions. It is very difficult to separate the theme of woman in concubinage from that of woman as sole head in the literature because the two constantly interweave as one woman moves from man to man or must support herself (and children) while her mate pursues additional sexual involvements.

In Brother Man, a masterful novel by Roger Mais, we meet a number of women whose stories reflect the insecurity of the lower-class Jamaican woman we have been describing. Although the novel is set in Kingston, Edward Brathwaite, eminent Jamaican critic, tells us that it depolarizes "rural and urban norms."²² In fact, many of the characters are recent city arrivals.

Here, for example, is the story of Minette, who lives with Brother Man, a Rastafarian leader whose house is in "the lane":

She thought about herself and about Bra' Man,
and her thoughts were a seething mass of confusion.
He had rescued her, starving off the street.
She had run away from the country to come to

Kingston, and what had happened to thousands of girls before, had happened to her. She was hungry and homeless, a girl of seventeen, without hope and without illusions, and he had found her like that.

She had come up to him in a crowd out by South Parade, had begged him to take her home with him, as she had done to other strange men so many times before. Some had treated her good, and others not so good. But this one was different. He seemed not to understand what it was all about, that she was soliciting him.

He had just looked at her, until her eyes fell to her hands clasped in front of her, and said, 'You hungry, me daughter, you don't have no place to sleep tonight?'

And she felt the tears welling up in her eyes, and had just nodded, unable to speak.

"Come with me then. I will take you home.'

And that was it. He had taken her to his home, had made up a pallet for her in the kitchen, and there she had come to rest. That was going on two years ago.

.....
...she never thought of asking him to marry her.
...there was nothing at all the matter with that;
men and women lived like that all over the place,
in the country and in the city alike. It didn't
matter the least, it was nothing.²³

Minette is most fortunate in having found Brother Man, for "he had given her more than anybody in the world had ever given her. He had given her self-respect, and a purpose for living...."²⁴

Other women are far less fortunate: for example Hortense, who lives next door to Minette. When Minette hears her singing "Nobody knows de trouble I've seen, Nobody knows but Jesus," Minette reflects that "she had good cause to sing like that, too, for bad luck had come to her ever since she had got herself in a family way by a sailor, for she didn't know any other way to make a livin' than by walkin'

the street ketchin' men."²⁵ That is how Hortense began her life as a sole head.

And then there is Jesmina:

She had met [Shine] one night at the Rockney Club, a cheap night club along East Queen Street.... Before that week was out it was the accepted thing that she was his girl, and he was her young man. It was never said in so many words between them, but it was there, valid and sufficient.²⁶

Jesmina lives with her sister, Cordelia, who has a three-year old child. Cordelia's man, Jonas, is in prison for selling "ganga." It is implied that Jonas is the boy's father. Cordelia is ill and begs her sister not to leave her. She repeats what "shame" she feels and how badly men treat their women. "Ah Shame fo' walk down de street. De women stare, dem shame me, can 'most hear dem a-whisper ... Ah Shame, Ah shame, so tell....man dem never consider 'pon dat, how dem wife wi' shame--jus' wuk she, use she, all dem ever want...."²⁷ Later in the story, Cordelia goes insane, kills her sick child and hangs herself.

Still another household:

There was a man who had been living with his sweetheart for some seven years, three years of which he had spent in jail. He had never had any children by the woman, but while he was in jail, that is to say during the second year of his sentence, she had had a child. He had forgiven her unfaithfulness, and they were living together again as man and wife, but he was not prepared to go to the length to supporting another man's child, what with the cost of things what it was in these days.²⁸ [My ital.]

This passage underscores the precarious nature of this couple's "union" and the defeating position the woman finds

herself in. The man she "lives with" is not able to support her, yet she is considered unfaithful for having another man's child. Given the social pressure to bear children, such a woman very likely would have had another man's child just to be a mother. Or, she may have hoped that having his child would guarantee his support. This too is a common pattern. The following passage from "Story" by Christine Craig illustrates this problem:

She was thinking of all those poor women all over the place, hundreds and thousands of dry backyards, washing in pans under breadfruit trees. Washing men's clothes and babies clothes. Different men's clothes every year but the same babies clothes as they passed on down to baby number 5, baby number 6, every new baby a new hope that this one would stay with her and treat her good. Stay with her and treat her good. Such a simple and universal hope that remained so universally unfulfilled.²⁹

Papacita and Girlie are still another couple from Brother Man. At the opening of the novel, the folks in the lane are singing:

.....
Papacita beat up him gal las night ...
Is a shame de way dem two de-live ...
Gal wann fo' him and she get married ...
Hm! Papacita know what 'married give ...³⁰

Papacita does not treat Girlie well; the folks say he beats her up. In chapter one, Papacita and Girlie argue over his nocturnal activities. He claims to be looking for a job; she is sure he is flirting with other women. He tries to soothe her: "Going go to wuk fo' you an' me." Contemptuously she replies, "You get you 'self a job, Papa-boy, Ah get

meself wings an' fly."³¹ We are not told how Girlie makes a living, for Papacita does not work. But when his supply of cigarettes runs out, he looks in her purse for change to buy more. And it is she who buys breakfast for both of them.

Eventually, Papacita and Girlie separate, having expressed their mutual frustration in a bloody, physical fight.

(The Jamaican woman is not docile as is her Haitian counterpart.)

Later, Girlie's "love-craziness," as Brathwaite puts it, leads her to kill Papacita. In Girlie's case, the frustration is directed outward; in Cordelia's case, inward. In all cases mentioned above, with the exception of Minette, the psychic and emotional energy of women is totally thwarted; none ever has the opportunity to express it in a normal, gratifying way. So, often it is expressed violently--either against another or against herself. The tragedy, on both individual and social levels, is profound.

Orlando Patterson, sociologist and novelist, currently a full professor at Harvard University, has written several novels, one entitled The Children of Sisyphus. Sisyphus is a Greek mythological figure whom "the gods had condemned ... to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor."³² The "children" of Sisyphus, referred to in the title, do not push a rock up the side of a mountain; Patterson portrays theirs as a worse punishment.

They are inhabitants of the "Dungle," a slum far worse than a slum, and they are described as less than human. The garbage man thinks, as he enters the Dungle where he dumps the refuse, "It was all a facade, anyway. All a meaningless, ghastly facade... They weren't there. Those things. Those creatures of the Dungle. No, they weren't human,... Those eyes peering at him. Deep and dark red and hungry for what he carried..."³³

Among the "creatures" of the Dungle is Dinah, who has lived there for fifteen years and with Cyrus for six of the fifteen. And although the Dungle reputedly drains one of any "ambition" to get out, Dinah is resolved to leave the "stinking place." A policeman, a "Special Constable," has "promised to keep her," and so she is going to leave Cyrus, whom she has been supporting by prostitution, for a new man. Dinah's story reads much like Minette's of Brother Man: She had left her mother in the country and come to the city with a woman who offered to adopt her. When she complained that the woman's husband was forcing her to have sexual relations with him, she was "kicked out" by her so-called mistress. And then she had been picked up on the street by a man who said he'd give her "ambition."³⁴ The "ambition" he had given her was channeled into prostitution, and she seems proud of her experiences. "She had courted thieves and drunkards and murderers, not to mention the narcotic sailors. She had been raped, mauled, plundered and knifed. She was a woman who had lived life."³⁵ Later, she moved in with Cyrus and supported him. "She had been good and faithful to him as far as it was possible for a whore to be good and faithful. She had a pickney[child] for him."³⁶ Dinah is desperate to break out of this vicious circle

of poverty and debasement, and, unlike most of the mothers we have seen, she does not want her child:

...how glad she was to be getting rid of him! She never saw the reason why she should have to be burdened with the care of another human being when she could hardly take care of herself. ... As a matter of fact now she thought about it...she hated him.³⁷

But Dinah is disillusioned in her search for the life of a "normal woman." She discovers that her new home is not much better than the Dungle.

Though the rooms were better than those of the Dungle, there were about twice as many to each of them. The women and their children, their many, many children, their old sick, unwanted mothers, and their men, two-night-standers and weekenders, temporary daddies and uncles whom the tough little children smiled upon with mocking cynicism...³⁸

True to the theme of Sisyphus, Dinah is ultimately cruelly defeated and at the end of the novel returns to the Dungle.

The literary images of women demonstrate how the social and economic insecurity of their lives is both cause and effect of the instability of their conjugal unions.

Regarding the woman who is sole household head, Peggy Antrobus wrote in 1975:

There is a widely observed notion that Jamaica is a matriarchal society. The evidence to support this is usually the fact that about a half of households are headed by women. These women are in fact very insecure and without the economic resources to exercise any real authority. The young woman who has the sole support of her children is in a position of extreme dependence and is constantly seeking a man who would support herself and the children.³⁹

Elsewhere, Hermione McKenzie, a Jamaican sociologist, points out that a woman's insecurity in a conjugal union may lead her to

have children in the hope that they will "stabilize the union."⁴⁰

Thus the vicious circle of the woman who continues to have children to keep men who, in turn, cannot support her and for this reason, among others, leave her a sole household head.

Lucille Mair also emphasizes the oppression and hopelessness experienced by the so-called "matriarchal" sole household head:

The rather tired cliché of the black matriarch perhaps contains some validity in terms of the number of women who head their own households (approximately one-third of Jamaica's adult females in 1972) and in terms of the moral strength they can, and do, exercise within the family. But one has to register considerable reservations about the assumption that to be a female head of household is to have some kind of natural access to authority. A considerable number of the single female heads are among the most powerless of the society.

The economically depressed condition of such a female breadwinner makes her as sexually vulnerable as she was in the darker days of her history. Not only does she outnumber the man in the city, she is a migrant, unsupported by the traditional familial and communal resources of the countryside which she has fled. Singlehanded, she is unable to control the forces which circumscribe her life and that of her children. She turns more and more to a new paterfamilias, the state, admitting her powerlessness to deal with the one meaningful role the society leaves to her, the role she traditionally values most, that of mother. Reluctantly, she now opts out, even of that.⁴¹

Mair adds:

The single most disturbing social phenomenon of contemporary Jamaica is the physical and/or moral abandonment of children by single young mothers.⁴² [My ital.]

Recall that in the Haitian novel Fils de misère, a single young mother abandons her child in the hospital. In The Children of Sisyphus, Dinah abandons her son to an uncertain future. Although the boy has somewhat of a "father" in Cyrus, Dinah has always supported both of them.

As mentioned earlier, Jamaican imaginative literature is full of images of women who are sole household heads.

There is Keturah in The Children of Sisyphus. She lives in the Dungle and refers to herself as "jus' a poor beggar woman wid siven starving pickney." She is nursing naked twins with "the last dram of nourishment in her," and they as well as five other little ones are physically deformed because of malnutrition. Because of the reputation of the Dungle as "a den o' thieves and cultists," Keturah is fired from her job as washerwoman. She wonders what wrong she has done to deserve this and says that the only sin she has ever committed is to find herself in the Dungle and "me no responsible fo' dat."⁴³

In The Hills of Hebron by Sylvia Wynter, Lisa Edwards is a middle-aged single mother who sells homemade candy at the market:

Two of her children were alive, the other five having died of hunger. The men who fathered her children had all left her and gone off in search of work, chasing a mirage of greener pastures.⁴⁴

Kate Matthews is another:

Her mother had died and left her, at sixteen, with three young brothers to care for. She managed this by scraping a living from odd jobs, and with a little help from neighbors all as poor as herself. At times she had almost given up in despair at the near hopelessness of her task. On such occasions she swore to herself to have nothing to do with men. The only legacy they left one with were children.⁴⁵

In contrast, a male character from the same novel recalls that the word "Mother" was "just a dirty word to me." His sixteen-year-old mother had abandoned him to his grandmother, who passed him on, when he was still an infant, to his other grandmother. The latter died while he watched, in her "broken-down" room behind the smokey kitchen of the guest house where she worked as a cook. He had tried to run for a doctor, but as "the only doctor in town charged a guinea for each visit and insisted on being paid in advance by his poorer patients,"⁴⁶ she would not let him go. For she had been saving up her wages and "hoped soon to ... pay down on a half acre of land, plant ground provisions and earn enough to give her grandson a proper schooling; give him the kind of opportunity that none of her family had ever had."⁴⁷ He was seven years old when she died, but he remembers her "hard brute work" that caused her face to "wrinkle up" when she was still young. And he loved her more than anyone else. This passage illustrates Edith Clarke's comment about the importance of the grandmother and the grandmother-headed household in the Caribbean.

The final example of a woman heading a household is Mary from The Children of Sisyphus, reminiscent in many ways of Lamerchie in the Haitian novel Fils de misère. Like Lamerchie, Mary, illiterate, is putting her daughter through school with great pride and expectation. She believes that Rosetta will finish university, return to England, marry a rich Englishman, and take her to live in an English castle. Unlike Lamerchie, Mary claims to know who her

child's father is--a white sailor. Although no longer a young woman, she has been a prostitute for years. Rosetta is "brown," and this, Mary feels, distinguishes her from the other "black pickney." "Is her father she get de brains from. Me black an' stupid, but her sailor father give her all de brains she need."⁴⁸ Mary adores her child.

When Rosetta wins a scholarship to high school, Mary is determined to supply good food and clothes for her, "even if she [has] to steal, even if she [has] to kill."⁴⁹ But as long as she "still 'ave little flesh 'pon me body," she will best earn money that way. "An when de whoring' slack off me can go an' clean people house fo' dem."⁵⁰

Toward the end of the novel, Mary is arrested and jailed for having attacked the drunken and violent sailor she had taken to a brothel. While in prison (where she is brutally beaten and kicked by a guard), she is promised bail by a social worker if she will sign papers giving Rosetta up for adoption. When she is released several hours later, Mary finds Rosetta at school and takes her back to the Dungle, telling her that "they" had tried to poison her mind against her mother and that she will never, never let them take her away. But soon police arrive and they forcefully, beating Mary, separate Rosetta from her mother. But the saddest irony is that Rosetta, having had a glimpse of life with a middle-class family, has begun to turn away from her mother. "For a moment she seemed almost to despise the toiling, frantic slut in front of her. ... She continued to stare at [her] mother, as if seeing her for the first time, as if hearing her from afar and somehow fascinated by the distant wailing of her ghastly, grappling voice."⁵¹

While Mary struggles and weeps, Rosetta rejects her mother.

"I must go. I want to go. ... Goodbye, Mama,"⁵² she says, walking toward the car that will take her away forever.

Rosetta's rejection of her mother is the reverse of the usual mother's abandonment of the child. It is another way of portraying the powerlessness of the single mother: she is powerless to keep children she wants and because of her powerlessness and destitution, her children reject her. The author's handling of these two characters is a very powerful statement about women, about single mothers and about the society at large.

II. QUESTION OF MOTHERHOOD; THE VALUE OF CHILDREN; AND WORK

In Jamaican as in Haitian society, children are highly valued, and a woman who is not or cannot be a mother is scorned. (Recall what has been said about motherhood and the value of children in African society.)

During the period of slavery, women were encouraged to bear children because they would become valuable workers. Lucille Mair writes: "...she was urged in a number of ways to bear and rear children. ...she was granted special concessions, such as extra food and clothing,...after she had borne six children she became by law a privileged person, exempted from hard labor."⁵³

The value and prestige of childbearing has persisted in Jamaican society, although it has taken on new meanings. As mentioned earlier, women often have children to hold their men; this may be meant to appeal to their sense of responsibility or to their sense of virility. In The Hills of Hebron, a man whose wife has been

barren for a long period of time at last feels "his manhood restored" at the birth of a child. (Ironically, the child has not been fathered by him, but his wife has kept this a secret.)

Edith Clarke confirms that a woman who does not bear children is "an object of pity, contempt, or derision."⁵⁴ She may be referred to as a "mule," typical also in Haiti. Clarke writes that a barren woman may even go insane, such is the social and emotional pressure to bear children.⁵⁵ (Again, recall Karen Horney's theory discussed in the Ghana section.) A man will certainly have nothing to do with a barren woman and may leave his barren mate believing that he and she "do not match."⁵⁶

Clarke also confirms that a man's virility is proven, he feels, by the impregnation of a woman. Thus, and this is most important, "There is no incentive for either man or women to avoid parenthood even in promiscuous relationships..."⁵⁷ Further, once the man's virility has been proven, he feels no continuing responsibility as a parent, but regards this as the woman's duty, and hers alone.⁵⁸

In The Children of Sisyphus, a barren woman and her man argue:

The man was laughing and swearing at her, pointing to her large, inflated belly and shouting that it was only newspaper that was there.
'All day long me see you wid pregnant stomach, year in, year out, an' when time fe baby come me can't see no baby. All you 'ave stuff up inside there is newspaper. Is shame you can't 'ave baby like other woman!"⁵⁹

The woman screams frantically that she can have a baby too, but it's "taking a little time to come."

On the other hand, Indrani Sinanan, a Trinidadian woman, writes about the Caribbean woman who is not frantic to have children:

It is the Caribbean woman who, despite opposition in many cases from her legal or common-law husband, has given her support and cooperation to the Birth Control Programme in the area, which would otherwise be a total failure despite the work of the medical authorities, social workers and the Church.⁶⁰

This observation is supported by the example of the pregnant woman in The Hills of Hebron who wants her unborn child to die so that she and the child might be freed from the vicious circle of poverty and destitution.⁶¹ But nowhere in the literature surveyed for this study do we find reference to contraception or abortion. And Merle Hodge, in discussing the horror of barrenness in Caribbean society, adds that women are made to feel "harrowing guilt"⁶² in the case of an abortion.

Thus, while children are certainly highly valued in Jamaican society, the social and economic oppression a mother suffers will lead to ambivalence toward children-- born and unborn. What has often been said about birth control efforts would seem to apply to Jamaica: Until the woman becomes aware of her worth as an individual through education and a higher standard of living, and is given the opportunity to use her abilities and express her creativity, she will resort to childbearing as the only source of self-esteem and means of securing a man--one way to a better life.

III. WORK

The question of the value of children is very much tied to that of work, as are both these questions to that of the woman, sole household head.

An article in Africa Woman entitled "New Agricultural Role of

Jamaican Women" discusses the "major importance" of women's role in the Emergency Production Plan of 1977, created to stimulate the development of land, farm activities, food production as well as to create the "conditions which will improve life." According to the author, the women's bureau was to integrate women into all phases of the plan. In addition, the women were, she says, realizing "the necessity to change their attitudes. ... to encourage their children to take to agriculture. ... These women, unlike a vast number of their men, have learned from experience that the land is the thing on which their economic future lies. They realize also that they have always been compelled to feed their families."⁶³

This article is encouraging in view of the fact that Jamaica's rate of growth of domestic production and of exports has dropped drastically in the last several years. Importation has greatly increased and the average rate of inflation in the past few years has been 20-25%.⁶⁴ It is also encouraging in view of the fact that extremely large numbers of women have migrated from the rural areas to the towns and cities. For this reason, many novels reflect the problems of urban women. Today, the female unemployment rate is 40% compared with approximately 13% for men.⁶⁵

Lucille Mair writes:

The woman's participation in agriculture fell from 57% in 1921, to 28% in 1943. In 1972 it was less than 20%.

Escaping from the land, she headed for the towns, where 43% of Jamaica's women, (compared with 39% of its men), now live.⁶⁶

Mair emphasizes not only the unemployment of women but their underemployment as well:

But her mobility led her to another vocational dead-end; she exchanged the oppressions of the canefields for those of the city's kitchens. 125,000 Jamaican women, approximately 40% of the females on the labor market in 1972, were in "service" occupations. Overworked and underpaid house helps, still often required to "live in," now dominate the female working population: unlike the multiple complexion of commerce which employs some 15% of working women, and favours the lighter-skinned, the color of domestics is preponderantly black. Indices of their low status are their wage rate, averaging \$8 weekly--the worst in the national economy--their unemployment rate, 34%--also the worst--and their exclusion from trade union organization.⁶⁷

Mair also mentions that women in the tourism industry are confined to positions as chamber-maids, and women in industry are slotted to "women's skills" jobs, ranking them barely above the manual untrained worker.⁶⁸

In an interview in Africa Woman magazine, Carmen McGregor, Jamaica's first appointed Minister for Women's Affairs, stated that the female 40% unemployment rate accounted for "sexual exploitation, a number of women under twenty-five [having] an average of five children..."⁶⁹ "Sexual exploitation" may refer not only to the underemployment described by Mair but also to prostitution, portrayed prominently in the imaginative literature. In spite of the high rate of women, according to Mair, engaged in domestic service, Jamaican women are said to reject jobs they regard as degrading even in the face of unemployment. (This was confirmed recently in a discussion between this writer and a well-informed Jamaican woman working in the U.S.) In the novels we have seen thus far, both rural and city women turn readily to prostitution.

In The Hills of Hebron, two young girls, aged fifteen and sixteen, begin "casual prostitution" in a near-by town and then run away to Kingston to take it up seriously.⁷⁰ In The Children of Sisyphus, Dinah has been a prostitute for fifteen years when she leaves the Dungle. "Longing to move forward," she accepts a job as a maid servant in a suburban household.

It was with mixed feelings that she was going to this job. ...it was her pride that was trembling with pain. She was going to be a domestic. Wait on brown people. Carry out their chimmy. Clean them floor. Yes, ma'am; no, ma'am, them. She would have to make herself humble. She, Dinah, would have to humble herself. She wondered if she could do it. She wondered.⁷¹

As it turns out, Dinah cannot do it, not for long. "...she hated the place, the food, the orders she got, all of which so completely humiliated her. She could smash everything, she could almost kill in her rage. Yet she stayed on. ...in the humiliation and bitterness there was the sheer pleasure of pain."⁷²

This "pleasure in pain" theme among lower-class, black women is emphasized by Patterson but is evident elsewhere as well. In a sense, prostitution also represents a kind of pleasure in pain as does the rude, often brutal treatment women accept, and seem almost to expect from their male mates. Recall Minette's comment regarding Brother Man who rescued her from the street: "He had given her self-respect, and a purpose for living,...more than anybody else in the world had ever given her." Surely no one had ever done this for Dinah, or Mary, or Girlie, or any of these women. For most of their lives, no one had ever suggested to them that they might be worth something as human beings. They were of course told by men that they were beautiful and desirable, but then those

men exploited them, either leaving them with the responsibility of children or allowing them to demean themselves daily in order to support them. (We do not mean to imply that the men willfully exploit their women, for both men and women are portrayed as being socially and economically adrift in their society.) The exception is Rosetta, who, Patterson suggests, is significantly not black but "brown." When she is praised for her intelligence and shown the possibility of a bright future, she rejects her black mother and the defeating situation she represents. The others, without hope or self-confidence, are riveted to it. If prostitution is preferred by these women to domestic service, perhaps it is because it does provide a modicum of self-esteem.

"The Harder They Come," directed and produced by Perry Henzell in 1972,⁷³ has been called by critics the first major Jamaican film because it gives a picture of the society beyond that of the travelogue. In the film a young man named Ivan comes to Kingston from the country where he had been living with his grandmother, who has died. For a time he does odd jobs for a preacher. His fine talent as a singer is blatantly exploited when he makes a best-selling record but receives a pittance for it. Then he turns to the drug traffic and in the process kills a couple of policemen. Finally, Elsa, the young woman who loves him, turns him in and he dies at the end of the film in an abortive effort to escape to Cuba.

The film shows Elsa looking unsuccessfully for work and the sense of frustration and hopelessness for both her and Ivan lead one to wonder what will become of yet another generation of young,

urban, lower-class Jamaicans. The women in the film are portrayed as leading marginal, insecure lives, without jobs and without men they can count on.

Similarly, in Brother Man, the problems of work, unemployment and disillusionment are a constant source of bickering between Girlie and Papacita:

She would ask him how he expected the world to go on if men didn't work. That was the fool-woman kind of question she always kept shovin' at him. What did the world ever do for him, what the hell did he care about the world? Every man had to scuffle for himself--that was the law of existence as he knew it. It was a simple matter of individual survival, each man for himself. You only ball you' self up tryin' to think about things besides that, he kept tellin' her, but that woman was fool-dumb, she couldn't see his way.⁷⁴

Later in the novel Papacita becomes involved in a form of racketeering and for the first time makes some money. But the woman in the background, as shown in both "The Harder They Come" and Brother Man, is in the ambivalent position of loving and supporting her man while fearing and respecting the law. Jean Goulbourne's poem, "Rock My Baby," illustrates the woman's conflict:

.....
Over bush tea
in the morning
the mother
begs
the child

No thief
mi pickney
no thief.

There
in the courthouse
the mother
cries

No more
my son
no more.⁷⁵

The vicious circle of unemployment, crime, and imprisonment creates tension between the man and woman, a terrible frustration within each, and often violence between them as well as violence directed toward the society at large. It is easy to see how the problems of family instability and of women who are sole household are integral parts of this vicious circle.

IV. HEALTH

As in Haiti, the poor, lower class Jamaican has a cheap, inadequate, unbalanced diet. In the Dungle (The Children of Sisyphus) people live from whatever uncontaminated garbage they can retrieve from the heap--often they take anything. The morning after Dinah leaves the Dungle and moves in with the policeman who keeps her, she fixes herself breakfast. When she opens the little fridge, she is amazed:

Never in her life had she seen such a collection of good food. It was not the habit to store food where she was bred. When you wanted it you went and bought it and if there was no money, well, you did the next-best thing, you went and dug it up from the filth of the garbage cart. But look here. ...Fresh food. ... Not rotting. ... It was almost unbelievable.⁷⁶

Finally, Dinah tries to cook an egg, a "curious object" to her, never having eaten one before. She is not sure how to crack it open and when she finally does, she splatters herself with the hot oil sizzling in the pan. In a rage of frustration, she kicks over the little stove. Finally, she eats the more familiar foods--cod fish, bread, and cacao.

Similarly, Dinah cannot eat the food prepared for her lunch in the suburban home where she is a maid: the fish, cold potatoes, and especially pie make her nauseous. Later, when she is told

by her mistress to vacuum a room that "badly needs cleaning," she is "astonished, as no matter how hard she tried it was impossible for her to detect one speck of dirt anywhere in the place"; she assumes that "this was another of the mysteries of high living."⁷⁷ We might call these examples from the novel proof of the relativity in the perception of well-being. She prefers, understandably, the foods to which her palate is accustomed. This represents one of the major obstacles in health and nutrition education in all the developing countries.

This last passage from "Story" by Christine Craig reveals the perception a rural woman has of an agronomist from the city as well as her own logic applied to food growing, selling, and nutrition:

Every square inch of her property was used. Hot pepper, sweet pepper, beans and peas, irish potato, sweet potato, yam. Marthy frowned at her tomato plants, they looked sickly and spotty. Reminded her of the Agricultural expert who'd come round. Told them to grow one crop and sell it for a good price instead of growing little, little all around. She kissed her teeth in new vexation remembering his schoolified voice. "The experts has done whole heaps of tests on this soil and tomatoes is just the crop for this area." Marthy popped off a dead leaf and crumbled it in disgust. Just as well she had only planted a few. The fellow so stupid. What was the point of growing whole heaps of one thing to go and hassle yourself to sell it to get enough money to turn around and buy the very things you could grow for yourself. "Then suppose now" Marthy mumbled to herself "Just suppose I did plant out in tomatoes and dey never thrive. I woulda did en up wid no money an nothing to eat neither." Marthy kissed her teeth and pushed open her door.⁷⁸

This quote is valuable for it reveals the industriousness and knowledge of the Jamaican rural woman with respect to food growing. The life of this woman is a simple one, but her standard of living is unquestionably far better than that of the urban women portrayed

in Jamaican literature. This suggests that the Emergency Production Plan discussed earlier might be one means of attracting urban women to the rural areas, thus improving the condition of a large proportion of Jamaican women as well as their men and families.

Footnotes

¹Judith Blake, "A Reply to Mr. Braithwaite," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1958), p. 235.

²Lucille Mathurin, "Reluctant Matriarchs," Savacou (1977), pp. 1-5.

³Peggy Antrobus, "The Emerging Status of Jamaican Women," Africa Woman, No. 1 (October/November 1975), p. 40.

⁴Oswaldene Walker, "Health Needs of the Caribbean Woman: With Particular Emphasis on Dental Care," The Caribbean Woman: Her Needs in a Changing Society, ed. Esme Benjamin, (Proceedings of a Conference held on June 30, 1975 at Howard University, Washington, D.C. in honor of International Women's Year, under the auspices of the Caribbean American Inter-Cultural Organization.), May 1977.

⁵Myrna D. Bain, "Images," Savacou (1977), pp. 14, 16.

⁶Ibid, p. 17.

⁷Edith Clarke, My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Family in Three Selected Communities in Jamaica (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), p. xx.

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⁹Ibid, p. 83.

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- ²⁷Ibid, p. 17.
- ²⁸Ibid, p. 122.
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- ³⁵Ibid, p. 30.
- ³⁶Ibid, p. 33.
- ³⁷Ibid, pp. 35-6.

- ³⁸Ibid, p. 93.
- ³⁹Antrobus, p. 41.
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- ⁴⁹Ibid, p. 139.
- ⁵⁰Ibid, p. 89.
- ⁵¹Ibid, p. 184.
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- ⁵³Lucille Mathurin (Mair), The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica, 1975), p. 5.
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- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Patterson, p. 23.
- ⁶⁰ Indrani Sinanan, "The Caribbean Woman's Contribution to the Quality of Life," The Caribbean Woman: Her Needs in a Changing Society, ed. Esme Benjamin, May 1977, p. 36.
- ⁶¹ Wynter, p. 173.
- ⁶² Hodge, p. 43.
- ⁶³ Pamela Bowen, "New Agricultural Role of Jamaican Women," Africa Woman, No. 12 (November/December 1977), p. 29.
- ⁶⁴ "Background Notes: Jamaica," Department of State Publication 8080, Revised January 1977.
- ⁶⁵ Antrobus, p. 41; Pamela Bowen, "Carmen McGregor, Jamaican Minister of State for Women's Affairs," Africa Woman, No. 14 (March/April 1978), p. 24.
- ⁶⁶ Mathurin, "Reluctant Matriarchs," pp. 4-5.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 5.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Bowen, "Carmen McGregor...", p. 24.
- ⁷⁰ Wynter, p. 160.
- ⁷¹ Patterson, p. 126.
- ⁷² Ibid, p. 134.
- ⁷³ Perry Henzell, "The Harder They Come," 1972.
- ⁷⁴ Mais, p. 43.
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Jamaica: Conclusions

Our findings on the perceptions of and about Jamaican women as shown in the imaginative and analytic literature suggest a need for the American development specialist to sensitize himself to the cultural differences between Jamaican and American women. The Jamaican man's and woman's perception of her social role as well as the interpersonal dynamics between Jamaican men and women contribute to the way in which both Jamaican men and women react to the American development specialist trying to integrate women into the development process.

The Jamaican woman's work role, conjugal and familial role, and health and nutrition role are all perceived according to the unique cultural values of Jamaica as well as the circumstances of the Jamaican woman's life. We emphasize that there are very great differences in each of these areas between Jamaican and American women and that the American development specialist must reorient himself culturally if he is to effectively integrate Jamaican women into the development process.

The style, substance, rhythm and channels of communication are also important factors influencing the effectiveness of the American working on development projects in Jamaica. Often the mode and timing of communication are more important than the thing communicated. Both sensitivity and good sense must be developed in this area. Jamaicans are open to others and tend to express their thoughts and feelings. They dislike condescension and are very perceptive of it.

Cultural Transfers: Synopsis

In this section, we discuss the similarities of culture and life style, notably those affecting women's lives, between Ghana and Senegal, Haiti and Jamaica. In designing and implementing programs for integrating women into the development process in certain areas of West Africa and certain areas of the Caribbean, the following cultural interrelationships should be considered:

- The matrifocal nature of Caribbean family life and the recurring maternal household parallels the central familial position of the West African woman; in both areas, the perception and organization of the family and the household tend to be unlike the typical western nuclear unit; the woman, sole head of household is a typical phenomenon in both areas.
- In both areas, the state of motherhood is accorded a high value and the barren woman is ostracised.
- Women play an important role in agriculture in West Africa and in the Caribbean; in both areas, they sell foodstuffs in the marketplace and tend to derive economic independence from this activity. Certain foods thought of as particularly West African are grown in the Caribbean and some have retained their original African names.
- In both areas, folk medicine and superstition tend to play important roles in the perception of physical and mental pathology and in methods of curing.

In this section, we define the term "cultural transfers" and describe how cultural elements transmitted from West Africa to the Caribbean have merged with new world culture to a greater or lesser extent. We cite the example of Creole language, which is in effect a linguistic hybrid.

The West African origins of the Afro-Haitian and the Afro-Jamaican, according to both anthropological and imaginative literary references are cited, demonstrating the cultural continuity between Africa and The Caribbean.

Emphasis is placed on elements of African culture and life style that are particularly apparent in Caribbean culture: family life and marriage forms; the value accorded motherhood and childbearing; aspects of work and agricultural life; types and names of foods eaten and the manner of their preparation; perceptions of medicine and curing; literary forms and content.

In all of these areas, our research indicates similarities--and of course differences--between West African and Caribbean women. We stress the similarities in this section, and urge those interested to read this section as well as the four preceding sections in full. The question of cultural transfers and the evidence that they continue to bind African women to their Caribbean sisters should be of particular interest to the project designer and to all those concerned with women in development in these two geographically remote but culturally linked areas.

CULTURAL TRANSFERS FROM WEST AFRICA TO THE CARIBBEAN

The term "cultural transfers" refers to those elements of African culture and lifestyle that were carried to the new world during the period of slavery and have survived in some form as important elements of Caribbean culture today. Many of these "transfers" show up in aspects of the Caribbean woman's life. We will review these below after a general summary of the larger picture.

Because Caribbean culture is an amalgam of African and new world elements, it must be viewed as a hybrid. For example, Haitian Creole is neither French nor African; it is a third language composed of features from the two parent languages. Nevertheless, certain African terms remain in both Haitian and Jamaican folk speech as proof of the continuity of the African languages brought to the colonies during slavery. Similarly, many African life ways, such as polygamy, were "reinterpreted,"¹ to use Melville Herskovits' term, in the new world, yielding a unique, complex culture. (Herskovits was perhaps the expert on African-Caribbean cultural transfers.) In many of the imaginative literary works of the Caribbean, elements of African culture are portrayed as having been submerged but continuing to operate at deeper levels. The main character in the Haitian novel Compère Général Soleil by Jacques Stephen Alexis, describes an occasion on which his "submerged" African heritage rises to the surface, making itself intensely felt. The occasion is the performance of a vaudou (voodoo) ritual in his home village. (Vaudou is of almost distinctly Dahomean origin, according to anthropologists.²

Dahomey is now Benin.)

It's terrible how Africa weighs down on the poor Negroes. They think they are detached from it and it suddenly rises to the surface, just when they least expect it, with its rhythms and mysteries. When fear or danger threaten them, ... the saints [voodoo gods] return from the former culture that sleeps in their heads...³

Haitian voodoo, which we will not discuss in detail here, is an interesting example of the "reinterpretation" Herskovits refers to. It is a combination of Catholic and African elements which have merged to form a syncretic religion. For example, the voodoo god Legba is identified with Saint Anthony, and so on.⁴ When the peasant prays, he may address the god/saint by both the voodoo and the Catholic names.

At the same time, other African elements are particularly apparent in Caribbean culture: aspects of family life and marriage forms; the importance of motherhood and childbearing; aspects of work and agricultural life; including types of foods eaten, the manner of their preparation, and terms used; perceptions of medicine and curing; literary forms and content.

Before discussing these specific subject areas, let us briefly summarize the West African origins of Haitians and Jamaicans.

Melville Herskovits wrote that the strip of territory on the west coast of Africa from which slaves were taken to the new world extended from Senegal to the port of Benguela in Angola. Within this territory, few slaves were brought to Haiti from Sierra-Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, or Cameroon, and there was little survival of Senegalese culture. The strongest surviving elements, he wrote, was that from the Gulf of Guinea.⁵ In addition, cultural elements brought by slaves from Dahomey, Ibos from Nigeria, and from the

Congo coast and Angola have been traced in Haiti.⁶ Although these cultural traces remain, they have merged with each other as well as with western culture so as to present a veritable mosaic today.

There are references to various African groups in Haitian literature that corroborate the anthropological theories and show an awareness on the part of Haitians of their African heritage. In Jacques Roumain's Masters of the Dew, a woman prays to her "loa [gods] of Guinea"⁷; a young man praises the beauty of a woman saying she resembles "a queen of Guinea"⁸; a woman mourning her son's death prays to the saints and the vaudou gods, saying, "My boy is dead, he is crossing the sea, going to Guinea, he will never return..."⁹ The Haitian peasant believes that the spirits of the dead return to Guinea, their ancestral home.

There are other references in the literature to Ibos, who were known for committing mass suicide to escape slavery; the Creole saying is, "Ibos pend' cor' a yo"--The Ibos (are those who) hang themselves.¹⁰ Yorubas too are mentioned. A beautiful young woman in Jacques Stephen Alexis' Les Arbres Musiciens is referred to as a "Yoruba Venus."¹¹

The dominant group making up Jamaica are the Akans of Ghana, according to both Leonard Barrett, a specialist in West Indian culture and religion, and Lucille Mathurin Mair, a sociologist and writer who is currently the Jamaican Ambassador to Cuba. Recall that Akan culture is noted for its tradition of matriliney. In The Sun and the Drum: African Roots in Jamaican Folk Tradition, Barrett writes:

Although various tribes entered Jamaica, the most dominant were the Ashanti-Fanti peoples who were closely related in origin and language. They were followed by the Yoruba-Ibo peoples whose influences can still be found in the islands. All other tribes seemed to have merged their identity, language, and religious customs with these two. Despite the strong Yoruba-Ibo complex in some places, the Ashanti-Fanti culture-complex dominated Jamaica as a whole.

Referring to the Gold Coast (Ghana), Mair writes: "...a very high proportion of slaves was exported [from the Gold Coast]. English slave traders shipped nearly half-a-million of them into the West Indies during the years 1690 to 1807."¹³ Mair's book, The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery cites numerous examples of the independent and rebellious Akan/Ashanti slave women in Jamaica who tenaciously preserved their African culture and life ways in the new world. One outstanding woman was Nanny, "the first national heroine of the Jamaican people." She was without question "of Ashanti origin and a free woman who never personally experienced slavery."¹⁴ Both her brother and husband were Maroons--the renowned militant black Jamaican rebels who fled to the mountains and established free communities which included women and children. (The Maroons, Mair says, were mainly Akan people.)¹⁵ One of the objectives of the Maroons was to preserve their "own free style of life." Because the Jamaican government eventually made peace with the Maroons in 1739, their villages continued and flourished as a rich reservoir of Akan culture,¹⁶ an important aspect of which was the major role of women.

In almost every major area of the Caribbean woman's life one finds traces of African culture. The preceding four sections on Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, and Jamaica contain numerous evidences of

cultural transfers in these major life areas--family and marriage, motherhood, work, health and nutrition, literary themes.

Good examples of how elements of African culture have merged with elements of the new world culture is Creole language, as mentioned earlier, and the form of the peasant house. Herskovits described the typical Haitian peasant house as having a roof whose thatching was "purely African" and walls of twilled withes, seen in West Africa today. At the same time, the rectangular floor plan is western as well as African and the furniture is entirely European.¹⁷ Similarly, dress styles are a mixture of the two. Women wear a European type of dress but retain the head-kerchief which is African.¹⁸ Women also continue to braid their hair in intricate patterns, a distinctly African art which continues today.¹⁹

At the beginning of both the Haitian and Jamaican sections, we stressed the matrifocality (the central role of the woman in the family) of Caribbean culture, adding that in some ways it resembles the tradition of matriarchy in Ghana and Senegal. (The difference is that Caribbean matrifocality has been shaped by slavery which did not, in the opinion of some scholars, enhance the status of the woman any more than it enhanced that of the man. Then and now, the "matrifocal" Caribbean woman must struggle against tremendous odds, as shown in the preceding two sections.) We find in the Caribbean the persistence of the maternal household, of the traditional independence of the African woman who provides for herself and her children. The matrifocal household in the Caribbean echoes the Ghanaian traditional system whereby a married man and

woman live with their respective matrikin, instead of under the same roof.

We emphasized in the Haitian section that "family" (to be carefully distinguished from the typical western nuclear unit) is far more important than marriage, and that marriage, as we in the United States understand the term, was not and is not considered a necessary prerequisite for having a family. In fact, marriage often follows after years of one or more common-law unions. These unions take the forms of plaçage and concubinage, which appear to be adaptations of polygamy to the new world.

The custom of a man having more than one wife in a plaçage or concubinage union seems to have evolved for the same reasons polygamy did--economic and spiritual. Multiple wives and their children may serve as hands in the fields. In addition, they enhance the status of the African and Caribbean man as a proof of his virility and wealth.

At the same time, the Caribbean woman, like her African counterpart, possesses a kind of independence, for better or for worse, in plaçage and concubinage unions. Because her husband may often be absent, she is not uncommonly the sole head of her household. We also discovered that the grandmother-headed household is common in both African and Caribbean society, which would seem to have its origins in the African system of matrilineage (the social system in which descent and inheritance pass down the maternal line).

Relatedly, in both Africa and the Caribbean, the extended family is of prime importance. As discussed in the Haitian section, Herskovits emphasized this in his findings in Haitian peasant

culture. In Africa, the system of matriliney often places in the hands of a woman's brother the power over and duties toward her children that we would think of as her husband's duties. The "maternal uncle" is a very important figure in the family. The Jamaican Leonard Barrett writes: "My upbringing was almost totally matriarchal; my father had little say in our training. However, the real influence in our lives was that of our maternal uncle, since he was the one who disciplined us and made the decisions for Mother concerning our day-to-day lives. My father was always in the wings, giving distant consent to whatever was decided."²⁰ Barrett's ancestors, he says, were Akan.²¹ As mentioned in the Haitian section, some social scientists have said that Caribbean matrifocality has more to do with indigenous social and economic forces than with any carry-over of African matriarchy. This testimony of Barrett's, in contrast, makes a very strong case for the continuity and presence of the original West African values and life ways in the West Indies.

The literary and anthropological references in the preceding four sections emphasize the continuing importance in the Caribbean of the African value placed on motherhood and childbearing. Children are important for both economic and spiritual reasons. They work in the fields with their parents, and the girls take up household tasks at a very early age, as do African girls, having learned them from their mothers. In addition, we found a strong similarity between the perception of the barren woman in both the African and Caribbean literatures. In both, she is abnormal, a "half-woman," or worse. In both literatures, the barren woman either feels guilty for a sin she may have committed

or believes a rival has placed a curse on her. In both cultures, she prays to her ancestors and performs traditional fetish rites to obtain a "cure." (In Haiti, the barren woman prays to the saints and the Virgin Mary and carries the extra burden of the Catholic Church's encouragement of large families.) In both cultures, she is likely to suffer extreme psychological stress if she remains childless. The role motherhood plays in African and Afro-Caribbean culture is an integral one and inseparable from other role functions of women.

In both cultures, the role of elder women, especially midwives, is important. In Haiti, as mentioned in the preceding section, the placenta is buried after the infant's birth as it is in Senegal (and perhaps elsewhere). Obviously, this has considerable religious and mystical significance in both cultures. In addition, in Haiti, according to Herskovits, the head of the newborn is moulded and shaped by the mother for some weeks after the infant's birth;²² in the film about Senegalese mothers and children, "The Cradle of Humanity," the custom of the mother's vigorously massaging the baby and moulding his head is stressed. (East Indian mothers also massage their babies, as this writer knows from personal accounts, and this may be a custom in other cultures as well.) Similarly, in both African and Caribbean cultures, the relationship between mother and child is ideally a close, intimate, sensual one. This is stressed in the literatures from both areas and discussed in the preceding sections.

In her work on the rebel woman in the West Indies during slavery, Lucille Mair emphasizes that the Akan women brought to the new world as slaves were between the ages of fourteen and forty.

By that age, she says, they had already passed through the "African tribal ceremony, the rite de passage which marked the transition from girlhood into womanhood."²³ The significance of this is that such women were already "steeped" in the African value accorded to motherhood and childbearing and so this feature of African culture was all the more likely to continue strongly in the new world. In addition, Mair tells us, slave women were encouraged to have many children and were rewarded when they had given birth to a certain number.²⁴

In the area of work, we have also seen many similarities between Africa and the Caribbean, although here especially the phenomenon of slavery significantly changes the meaning and perception of work in Caribbean culture.

Lucille Mair emphasizes that the slave women of Jamaica worked as hard as the men in the fields and continued to maintain their own plots on which they grew food provisions. These included "yams, plantains, dasheens, and other vegetables. ... They not only fed themselves on [these foods] but had crops left over and sold their surplus in the local markets. ...Some reared poultry and small stock as well and they gradually became the main suppliers of foodstuffs for the white creole household"²⁵ These foods are typically Ghanaian, and of course the market women in Ghana are so famous as to be called "Merchant Princesses."

Herskovits wrote that the Haitians he worked and lived among grew maize, congo peas, calabashes, melons, rice, millet, potatoes, manioc, bananas, sugar cane, yams, and also cabbage, squash, onions, garlic, peanuts, peppers, papayas, and spices. He also

recorded that there were trees providing coconuts, oranges, avocados, mangos, guavas, and other fruits. Many of these are African crops as well.²⁶

He writes at some length of the Haitian custom called the "combite," a form of cooperative labor and mutual self-help whereby rural men worked together in each other's fields. The origin of the combite is believed to be Dahomean. No monetary reimbursement was given, the exchange of help and the group work were payment enough as well as the large feast which followed the day's work.²⁷

While the men in a combite worked, they often sang songs to accompany their movements. These songs contained the gossip of the day, comments on the shortcomings of neighbors, details of scandals, or reproof of those arriving late to work.²⁸ Herskovits wrote, "The role of the combite song in exercising social control and enforcing conformity to local custom is entirely African, as is its function in stimulating work by setting a rhythm for it."²⁹

Another shared feature between Africa and the Caribbean in the area of agricultural work is the perception of the land as female. We discussed at length in the African sections the perceptual connection between food growing and childbearing and the mysterious relationship between women and agriculture. In the Senegalese work Ô Pays, Mon Beau Peuple! by Sembene Ousmane, the main character who is working the land speaks to the men who work for and with him in his fields: "One must not love the earth for what it gives, one must cherish it because it is ours. The earth is a mother and a woman."³⁰ ... Similarly, in the Haitian novel The Masters of the Dew by Jacques Roumain, there are several references to the earth

as woman. The main character compares the earth with a woman in that both are fertilized; elsewhere, he speaks of loving the land, of its having a place in his heart like a woman one loves, of its hills being like breasts and the branches of its trees like a woman's hair.³¹

It is interesting in this connection that parts of both Senegal and Haiti are similar in their extreme drought and the unworkable soil that results. This does not seem to weaken the perception of the land as almost human.

Similarities in the method of food preparation, the names of certain foods, and the attitude toward the sharing of food remain as well. Herskovits describes the Haitian women he studied as using the typical African mortar and pestle to pound grain. Cooking, he wrote, was done "on a raised mud platform in the cooking shelter, as in West Africa, or on three stones,...equally characteristic of Africa."³² In addition, the presence of certain kinds of stews, the use of pepper in preparing dishes and even the names of certain dishes, for example acansan, a "Nigerian-Dahomean" word for a sort of cooked ball of cornmeal are all typically African.³³ (In the Haitian novel Fils de misère, acansan is mentioned, but it is called "l'acassan.")

Leonard Barrett writes at length on the African foods he ate growing up in rural Jamaica. He tells of one particular dish called dokono, a favorite of his as a boy; he later learned when traveling in Ghana that dokono--a dried corn mixture wrapped in banana leaves and cooked--is a Fantɪ (Akan) word "used only among

the people of the Cape Coast."³⁴ Other Ghanaian foods, such as fufu, a mixture of yam, plantain, and cassava, boiled and pounded into a tough dough to be used in soup, is prepared and eaten in the same way in certain parts of Jamaica. Many Jamaican foods bear the same names they do in Twi, the Akan language. The popular Ghanaian palm-wine plant is also grown in Jamaica, and the nut of the plant is called an abe nut, the same term used in Ghana. In addition, Barrett writes, some of the vessels used to carry foods and eat from have the same names in Jamaica as they do in Ghana today.³⁵

Similarly, there is a common attitude toward food sharing between Africa and the Caribbean. In both cultures, sharing one's food is regarded as de rigueur. The woman of the house must always be prepared to serve any visitors who might arrive during or before a meal. If one does not offer food, this is regarded as an insult.³⁶ One last similarity is that of the women and children eating after the male adults. This occurs in both African and Caribbean households, as mentioned in the preceding sections.

We have already commented on the parallels between the West African market women--so important to African economy--and the Haitian market women who have developed a kind of kinship cooperation resembling that we have seen in Ghana. Like the combite, this is a form of mutual support. Among market women, the most common cooperative efforts are between kin: mother and daughter, a woman and her sister, her niece, her aunt, and so on. In both cultures, too, the market woman is astute in matters of capital management and often totally independent from her husband in this area.

In the area of health and medicine, both traditional African

culture and lower-class Caribbean culture reflect the authority of the fetish priest, the vaudou priest, or the West Indian healer. In both, the forces of magic and the use of fetishes and herbs are respected and trusted far more than western medical practices. Leonard Barrett writes of the considerable knowledge of Jamaican healers of the medicinal qualities of certain herbs, many of which have retained their Akan names.³⁷ This is still a form of medicine among Caribbean folk. In addition, the phenomenon of "witchcraft," or psychic healers is a powerful force in Caribbean culture, as it still is in African culture. Barrett quotes the advice of a western physician, knowledgeable about Caribbean healers, to other Caribbean doctors:

In a culture in transition from religio-magic thinking to scientific pragmatic thinking it is most important that not only the psychiatrist but every doctor be taught the social anthropological background of the patients with whom he deals, and know how these patients perceive him; for the doctor from the middle-class or social elite is usually surprisingly unaware of his patients' beliefs and value systems.³⁸

This is a rich and complex area which merits further study by those concerned with the role of folk medicine in development efforts.

Finally, the literary cultural transfers from Africa to the Caribbean are of major importance as they reflect a continuity in world view as well as in the perception of interpersonal relations.

The folktales built around the adventures of Bouqui and Ti Malice, popular in Senegalese oral tradition, are similarly popular in Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean. The tales, usually animal stories, are told during long story-telling sessions often by women, for the enjoyment of children (and adults); they are also an important part of children's education as they contain

moral lessons.

As mentioned in the Ghana section, the spider man, Ananse, or Kwaku Ananse, is a popular Ghanaian folk character and he is just as popular in Jamaica. Barrett writes, "So intricately woven is Anansi in Jamaican life that his cunning has become part of the Jamaican personality stereotype."³⁹ We recorded the outline of a story in the Ghana section about Ananse's son, Ntikuma. The name "Ntikuma" has become "Tacooma" in Jamaica.⁴⁰ This is an example of the merging of an African word or name with English linguistic elements, producing a hybrid--Creole.

In addition, at the opening of the Ghana section, we referred to Robert Sutherland Rattray's collection, Ashanti Proverbs. Hundreds of these proverbs, writes Barrett, "have turned up in Jamaica in their original form and many more...have been modified to fit New World conditions."⁴¹ Barrett emphasizes the importance of proverbs in education in folk societies. We can add that in many traditional societies, a large part of communication was carried on in the form of the exchange of proverbs. (This is probably still the case, especially where the African languages are spoken.) This is carefully recreated by Sembene Ousmane in his recent film "Ceddo" where men arguing major social questions, for example that of royal succession, carry on the debate in the form of proverbs. Barrett writes that according to an African saying, "there are three things worth having in this world: courage, good sense, and caution."⁴² The greatest number of proverbs concern these three things, and because courage, good sense, and caution

were much needed by the slaves, the folk tradition of proverbs continued and flourishes to this day among the peasant groups. This is true of both Jamaica and Haiti. An example of an Ashanti proverb translated into Jamaica Creole is:

Ashanti

It is the fool's sheep that
breaks loose twice.

Jamaican

One time fool no fool,
but two time fool him
a dam fool.

So, the cultural transfers of language, oral literature, and proverbs, as well as all the other transfers referred to in this section, testify to the common perceptions, in these two distant but spiritually contiguous areas, of interpersonal relations and of the meaning of life.

The subject of African-Caribbean cultural transfers is fascinating and complex. We have highlighted some of the major transfers that particularly affect women's lives in the Caribbean, and we urge a reading of the preceding four sections where some of these areas are treated in more depth.

Footnotes

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- 2 Melville Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley (New York: Octagon Books, Inc. 1964), p. 268.
- 3 Jacques Stephen Alexis, Compère Général Soleil (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1955), p. 125.
- 4 Herskovits, "Le Noir Dans le Nouveau Monde," p. 350.
- 5 Ibid, pp. 349-50.
- 6 Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, pp. 20-21.
- 7 Jacques Roumain, Gouverneurs de la Rosee (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Reunis, 1946), p. 126.
- 8 Ibid, p. 166.
- 9 Ibid, p. 204.
- 10 Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 21.
- 11 Jacques Stephen Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1957), p. 119.
- 12 Leonard E. Barrett, The Sun and the Drum: African Roots in Jamaican Folk Tradition (Kingston: Sangster's Book Stores Ltd., 1976), p. 16.
- 13 Lucille Mathurin, The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica, 1975), p. 1.
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Roumain, pp. 26, 30.
- 32
Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 254.
- 33
Ibid, p. 255.

34
Barrett, p. 22.

35
Ibid, p. 23.

36
Siga Sow, "The Matriarchal System as a Proof of the Social Role Played by the Woman in African Traditional Society, The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1957), p. 350; Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 68.

37
Barrett, p. 68.

38
Ibid, p. 91.

39
Ibid, p. 32.

40
Ibid, p. 33.

41
Ibid, p. 35.

42
Ibid, p. 37.

43
Ibid.

Cultural Transfers: Conclusions

Our findings on the cultural interrelationships between Ghana and Senegal, Haiti and Jamaica indicate that development specialists should think of these two areas in a similar way when integrating women into the development process. In particular, the woman's role in agriculture, her central position in the family, the high value placed on childbearing, and the woman's key role in the areas of health and nutrition are parallel aspects of West African and Caribbean women's lives.

We emphasize that these elements of West African Culture that have survived in the Caribbean are pieces of the larger cultural mosaic which includes many western elements. What has been produced is a kind of hybrid. Therefore, while we stress the cultural similarities to the development specialist, we also urge him to take the differences into consideration.

PHASE II: WORK PLAN

This study of the images and perceptions of women in the imaginative literatures of four developing countries (LDC) has been structured in two phases. The results and findings of the U.S. research which constituted Phase I are contained in this report. We have emphasized that these findings are by no means definitive. It is important that on-site research be conducted in the four LDCs involved (Ghana, Senegal, Haiti, Jamaica) to increase the usefulness and applicability of the Phase I report and extend our interpretation of the findings it presents.

The objectives of Phase II would be to study selected materials unavailable in the U.S., such as very recently published works of imaginative literature, oral literature, theatrical presentations, if possible, and film. In addition, the hypotheses presented in this report would be tested by on-site observation.

Implementation: Materials unavailable in the U.S. would be consulted by visits to libraries and special collections in the four LDC countries involved as well as through personal contact. Discussions with the writers whose works have been discussed in this study would be scheduled. The on-site observation would be carried out through visits to rural areas of particular interest to development specialists in order to gain first-hand information of the day-to-day aspects of the lives of women in the four LDC countries involved, and to talk with them about the four areas of their lives discussed in this study: work and food production; family life and the experience of

the woman, sole head of household, the value of motherhood; nutrition and health. By means of tape recording and note-taking, we would be able to recreate a segment of the LDC women's lives. This would be invaluable as an extension of the research already carried out in the U.S.

Travel Schedule

April 23	Depart
April 24-May 8	GHANA
May 9-May 24	SENEGAL
May 26-June 10	Washington, D.C., Debriefing and preparation of report
June 11-June 26	JAMAICA
June 27-July 12	HAITI
July 13-July 31	Washington, D.C., Preparation and writing of Phase II report.

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