



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AMINATTA FORNA'S *ANCESTOR STONES*

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Abstract

Ancestor Stones is a stunning work by Aminatta Forna published in 2006. The author is a Scottish Sierra Leonean writer whose work chronicles the experiences of four women in a polygamous family in West Africa. It is a novel about Africa and about women in Africa who are always faced with predicaments and frustrations by the male folks. This piece aims at examining the meaning and literary disposition of Forna's work as a contemporary literary figure.

Ancestor Stones is a wonderfully ambitious novel written from the inside, opening up a particular society and delving deeply into the hearts, histories and minds of women. The novel is set in fictional West Africa location most resembling Sierra Leone. *Ancestor Stones* is made of up multi-layered stories narrated through the voices of four women in Kholifa family: cousins Asana, Mary, Hawa and Seray whose different mothers are all married to the patriarch Gibril, a rich man.

The Novel is not only about women and feminism, polygynous family or gender roles and family structure but it is also about colonialism in Africa and its repercussions, it is about corruption in Africa, regionalism and tribalism, military regimes and civil war et al.

Thus, Forna has shown her mastery of the language by her display of themes and Characterizations that are so fashionable and thrilling. That brilliancy of hers has left a positive impression in the minds of the readers as they go through her artistic work.

Key Words: colonialism, Sierra Leone, Kholiffa family, polygyny, corruption.

1 .Introduction

Ancestor Stones is a 2006 novel by Aminatta Forna about the experiences of four women in a polygamous family in West Africa. Aminatta Forna (born 1964) is a Scottish and Sierra Leonean writer. She is the author of a memoir, **The Devil That Danced on the Water**, and four novels : **Ancestor Stones** (2006), **The Memory of Love** (2010), **The Hired Man** (2013) and **Happiness** (2018). Her novel **The Memory of Love** was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for 'Best Book' in 2011, and was also shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction. Forna is Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University and was, until recently, Sterling Brown Distinguished Visiting Professor at Williams College in Massachusetts. She is currently Lannan Visiting Chair of Poetics at

Georgetown University. On 7 March 2014, Aminatta Forna was announced as the recipient of the 2014 Windham – Campbell Literature Prize (Fiction). In 2015 Forna was part of the judging panel which awarded the Sunday Times EFG Private Bank Short Story Award to Yiyun Li. Aminatta Forna was just 11 when her father was hanged for treason in Sierra Leone. His real crime was being a popular leader of the opposition in a country sinking under one-man rule and headed for civil war. Forna fled with her family to Britain, and from there she gazed back until she could return, as an adult, to write a memoir, **The Devil That Danced on the Water**. Her next book was a novel, **Ancestor Stones**, which tells the story of an unnamed country in West Africa, as seen through the lives of four sisters and spanning eight decades.

“The book is set in Sierra Leone,” Forna tells Renee Montagne as part of a weeklong series of conversations on war and literature. “I chose not to name it when I wrote the novel because I simply wanted people to enter the stories and not overlay upon them that they thought they knew about Sierra Leone”- that is a war –torn country of summary executions, amputees and child soldiers.

Forna, who spent a year in Sierra Leone researching **Ancestor Stones**, found that women have a distinctly different perspective of war. “I spoke to a lot of women about their experiences of war

...The experience of war is different for women. Every woman in that country lived under the constant threat of rape and sexual assault. In my family’s village, on a single day when the rebels invaded, every single woman was raped and some of them were taken away”. When men talked about the civil war, “It was very much about what they did and where they were. This area was taken over and then I went here. Whereas the women talked much more about the emotional truths of war-what was really happening as opposed to what was simply happening in newsreel terms.”

One scene vividly captures the desperate reality of war. It takes place in a camp where refugees have been waiting a long time for a shipment of food to arrive. But when the crates are opened, it becomes apparent that there has been a mix-up.

“The boxes were full of lipsticks, hundreds of them, in their gold coloured cases. The men in blue helmets immediately surrounded the vehicle and prepared for a riot. All of us had such hunger in our bellies. But a moment later they pushed back their helmets and lowered their sunglasses; to make sure what they were seeing was really true. The women rushed forward, myself among them, to snatch up these shining lipsticks. The many miles between us and our lost homes, our rotting feet, the grass and leaves with which we had tried to line our stomachs, the emptiness of the future: for a short while all was forgotten. We stood in the sun, laughing and ribbing each other, our mouths in vivid colours.”

“War does reduce people to terrible circumstances, and it is that attempt to hold on to moments of pleasure, moments of joy in these tiny things....” Forna says. Aminatta Forna, whose moving and gorgeously written memoir garnered international attention, has seamlessly turned her hand to fiction in **Ancestor Stones** a powerful, sensuous novel that beautifully captures Africa’s past century and her present, and the legacy that her daughters take with them wherever they live. Abie has followed the arc of a letter from London back to Africa, to the coffee groves of Kholifa Estates. Abie returns to visit her family after years of civil war, and to reclaim the family plantation, Kholifa Estates, formerly owned by her grandfather. There she meets her aunts: Asana, Mariama, Hawa, and Serah, and so begins her gathering of the family and the country’s history through the tales of her aunts. Asana lost twin and head wife’s daughter. Hawa, motherless child and manipulator of her own misfortune. Mariama, who sees what lies beyond. And Serah, follower of a western made dream. Set against the backdrop of a nation’s descent into chaos, it is the take a family and four women’s attempts to alter the course of their own destiny. Stretching across generations and set against the backdrop of a country’s decent into free -fall,

Ancestor Stones is a stunning novel about understanding the past and how stories ancient and new shape who we have become, and one which offers a different way of seeing the world we share. It is the story of a nation, a family and four women’s attempts quietly to alter the course of their own destiny. The women’s tales are timeless tales of rivalrous co-wives, patriarchal society, and old religions challenged by Islamic and Christian incursions; they are modern stories of European-owned mining companies, the repressive influence of mission schools, corrupt elections, and the postcolonial African elite. Through their voices a family history interwoven with the history of a country emerges- one of a society both

ancient and modern, of a family of strong women refusing to live as second –class citizens. It is a wonderful achievement which has named her as a gifted novelist. It is the story of 20th Century Africa told through the lives of four remarkable women. Africa is a vast, complex and incredible diverse continent which is too often made conveniently homogenous.

Ancestor Stones is a wonderfully ambitious novel written from the inside, opening up a particular society and delving deeply into the hearts, histories and minds of women. Set in a fictional West African location most resembling Sierra Leone, **Ancestor Stones** is made of up multi-layered stories narrated through the voices of four women in Kholifa family: cousins Asana .Mary, Hawa, and Seray, whose different mothers are all married to the patriarch Gibril, a rich man who, by the time he dies aged 100, has acquired 11 wives.

2. Themes

The story is about the family of Gibril Umaru Kholifa, a polygynouse husband with eleven wives. The novel begins with a letter written by Alpha to his cousin, Abie. The letter urges Abie to come back home to revive the fortunes of the family coffee plantation. Abie’s aunts have decided to leave the family coffee plantation for her to revive. Once she is back home, Abie’s aunts tell her stories. These stories are about the polygynous family, civil wars, biracial marriage, economic struggle, education, religious conflicts, corruption and European incursion in mining centers.

These are therefore the issues I will be gazing at in subsequent lines.

(a) Polygynous Family, Gender Roles And Family Structure

The stories of the four aunts provide a rich body of knowledge about what polygyny means; how it is used in gender role negotiation; how the narrative critiques Ogunyemi’s womannism philosophy; and which ‘alternative tools’ the narrative suggests for gender role negotiation, which implies a conglomeration of intersecting ideas of vision, accessibility to another world and desire for change. As a character, Asana, in **Ancestor Stones** states, ‘I wanted to come to this world, to the place where things happen. I didn’t want to stay where I was. I always had big eyes for this world and I was born with them open. My mother never feared for me .There are some children –you can tell the ones – born with a hunger for life (Forna 16).

Unlike works by her literary precursors such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Grace Ogot, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Bessie Head as well as by her contemporaries such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Seffie Atta, Helen Oyeyemi, and Diana Evans, Forna’s **Ancestors** covers a broad historical trajectory during which tremendous changes in familial arrangements start taking place. The novel begins with a polygynouse family of eleven cowives and ends by portraying widowhood as empowering; it also sees women entering professions and deals with divorce and bi-racial marriage. **Ancestor Stones** provides a nexus between past and present with the aim of eschewing the historical past that was built on patriarchal power dominance and gender inequality. The contemporary generation of Africa women writers began to advocate new changes that ‘’ seek not only to re interpret, but to change the world in favour of women. Forna’s narrative offers an opportunity to reread the institution of polygyny in twenty-first century Africa. I consider the representation of the history of familial structure and space to be a stepping stone by means of which contemporary Africa women writers argue for change in the institution of family. Forna depicts the ineffectiveness of gender role negotiation tools in traditional Africa societies and the ways in which the contemporary generation can improve.

In discussing the history of familial structure and space as depicted in **Ancestor Stones**, I interrogate the eleven wives of Gibril Kholifa Umaru in order to establish their different perceptions and experiences of polygyny. I consider these eleven wives of Gibril as the ‘’older generation’’ in the sense of the genealogy of female characters depicted in the narrative. Here, I agree with Kenneth Harrow who views **Ancestor Stones** as a novel that takes us back a few generations to the women ancestors on the African side of Forna’s family in order to create a space that links the past with the present. Therefore, in this case, the narrative communicates those contemporary African women writers do not disavow history but rather rewrite it according to the socio-cultural needs of the day. Forna’s narrative reveals how female characters challenge patriarchal power and practically assume power and control in

decision making. Born in a large polygynous family of eleven co-wives, the narrators (Asana, Mariama, Hawa, and Serah) give a historical account of how their mothers were part of a polygynous institution. They depict their father, Gibril, as a rich man who uses his wealth to control and domesticate women. In narrating the contrast between Gibril and the slaughterhouse worker (Hawa's husband), Hawa says: "this man (the slaughterhouse worker) was so poor I became his only wife" (179-80). Since the slaughterhouse worker has no access to polygyny, Hawa has to lead her "married life working like a servant" (180). In this context the narrative appears to echo ideas of scholars such as Helen Ware, Dominique Meekers and Nadra Franklin, Obioma Nnaemeka, Michael Boyle, and Cynthia Cook who view the institution of polygyny in the African traditional context as advantageous to women. These scholars underscore the issues of shared responsibility and reduced labour force in the polygynous family. They are of the view that the higher the number of wives in the household the less toil women experience in the family. Hawa wants her husband to be polygynous in order to get co-wives who could help her in handling the household chores. She decides to divorce the slaughterhouse worker for failing to marry another woman. Through Hawa, readers are invited to read the institution of polygyny as a negotiation tool for gender roles in traditional African societies. It was powerful in lessening the burden of traditional 'women's roles in the family. In this regard, Hawa communicates a form of gender role negotiation through what Nnaemeka calls "compromise" with the patriarchal power. Nnaemeka points out that this strand of African feminism is built on the indigenous and it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchal in different contexts. Hawa grew up in a polygynous system and is therefore aware of certain men's desire to marry as many women as they can. In this context, Hawa is not only the link between the historical and the present polygynous family structure, but also attempts to reshape the modern day polygyny so as to become a weapon to lessen the burden of gender roles that are shouldered by women. Hawa's disapproval of her husband is not only because he is poor to the extent of not marrying other wives, but also she is not ready to be domesticated, "working like a servant"; rather, she wants to be flexible in life by altering "wife roles" between her and her co-wife. And, based on Meekers and Franklin's views on the mutual relationship between wealth and polygyny, Gibril (as the narrative suggests) is right to marry the eleven wives because he is rich and being rich in the traditional context was a precondition for polygynous marriage. As Meekers and Franklin would argue, women characters in the narrative also prefer polygyny "because polygynous husbands tend to be wealthy" and there is a possibility for them to be rich.

The need for women's flexibility and reducing gendered responsibility shouldered by women in polygynous marriage is also captured by Ya Namina, the senior wife of Gibril. She has the authority to choose wives for her husband and assign them responsibilities in taking care of their husband. What Ya Namina does as a senior wife is to "maximise (the family's) economic benefits by selecting hard-working co-wives, and to limit intra family conflicts by choosing those junior co-wives, (she) likes" and the one who can respect her as a senior wife. Ya Namina uses a polygynous family as a decent space for women's empowerment, maintenance of equity, justice, harmony and sharing of responsibility. Ya Namina subscribes to the African traditions by accepting the polygyny system that "provides children (and workers) for Africa's predominantly agricultural society, sons and men, and social security for women in their old age. Ya Namina holds the view that having many children means more labour and more labour means wealth. It can be agreed that in such a large polygynous family, it is hard to meet the interests of every individual and therefore rivalries are unavoidable. What matters is the harmony and cooperation among co-wives. Since Asana, Mariama, Hawa and Seray represent the generation of African women who are exposed to the two worlds (traditional and modern), they offer critique of the two worlds based on their own experiences. Knowing the advantages their mothers have in a polygynous household, Asana and Hawa opt for polygyny, which however is not equally advantageous to them. This is due to changes in time and space. They need first to reconfigure the polygyny system according to the needs of the modern world and make it a central institution for gender role negotiation. For example, Asana marries Osman Iscandari and becomes a third wife and Hawa, after divorcing the slaughterhouse worker, marries Khalil and assists Khalil in marrying another woman, Zainab. Khalil and Zainab eventually runoff, leaving Hawa helpless. Their decision to divorce in a polygynous family communicates feminist awareness. Women are no longer marginalised; they can speak their voice to challenge the patriarchal hegemony. As such, the four narrators, while embracing the indigenous, as Nnaemeka would have argued in the context of neo-feminism, attempt to reconfigure the institution of polygyny according to the needs of the twenty-first century Africa where negotiation between the two opposing powers (patriarchy and

matriarchy) has taken centre stage. The willingness of women to join the polygynous family, as depicted in this narrative, indicates that in a traditional African setting, a polygynous family system was not a problem and women preferred it and were ready to join because it helped in role shifts and cooperation among co-wives. What Asana, Mariama, Hawa and Serah view as oppressive to women is due to the influence of modernity. They have created their own world independent of their mother's generation. Their narration about their mothers more exterior, they have excluded them from participating in the narrative in order to demonstrate the power of the contemporary generation of African women characters to speak their voice and challenge traditional values that favoured men at the expense of women.

(b) Colonialism

Sierra Leone is a former British colony which gained its independent in the early 1960s. In the works of modern African writers, they tend to push hard by recounting the experiences of their countries in the colonial period. Aminatta Forna's novel **Ancestor Stones** clearly and ingeniously recounts African history and Sierra Leone experiences in particular. A narration of Sierra Leone history without narrating the effects and the experiences of colonialism is incomprehensive. In satisfaction of such requirement, Forna's novel creates a sensational picture of colonialism in Africa and Sierra Leone in particular. Serah narrates on how we have been misused by the Europeans by deciding on what to be done in our own country after we have voted our leaders:

“ We were allowed to choose our own Prime Minister and some members of the Cabinet, although the British would still tell them what to do.” (P170)

In one of the effects of colonialism, the whites who do not understand our culture and custom and because they wanted to exploit us, they dethrone some of the chiefs in the province who are not willing to comply with their rules. In one of Asana's stories, she recounts that Osman's father defies the 'pothos' when they come crowing chiefs. “Osman's father was one who resisted. He warned his brothers not to trust the pothos.”

(c) Regionalism And Tribalism

Sierra Leone has a standing record in regionalism and tribalism. These elements are really responsible for the crawling of this beautiful state. Forna's novel **Ancestor Stones** is never hesitant in bringing this to its lines. Candidly, tribalism and regionalism are normally prevalent in governance particularly in the eras of elections. Accordingly, Serah in **Red Shoes** says the election which is held that is to name Sierra Leone a republic is announced and the outcome is tainted with tribalism and regionalism.

“After much counting and recounting the results of the first election ever to be held in our soon-to-be republic were announced. On the radio the BBC World Service described it as a mixed verdict. An opportunity missed, they said. An African election marred once again by the plight of tribal vote. In almost every ward people had voted for members of their own ethnic group regardless, it seemed, of the qualities of other candidates.”

(d)The Position Of Women

Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor Stones** can be named equally as a fiction of women. It is feminist as it depicts the experiences of four women in Kholiffa Family. Certainly, most of the modern African female writers in which Forna is part of tend to bring to their lines the way African women are treated and positioned in a male chauvinist state. Seemingly, it is through the narrators that we realise that women in Sierra Leone during the 70s had no better position but were responsible to perform chores and take good care of their husband who are Gibril and others.

Better still, Sierra Leone is still having a stereotypical notion of women as people that worth no respect in society. In the mouth of Serah, she draws a beautiful and interesting link between the way women are treated in Africa to that of their treatments in Europe. Accordingly, women in the western world are treated like queens. This is vividly seen in her treatment by Ambrose and the waiters. She furthers that in Africa, it is the man who will eat first before the woman and the women are responsible to do menial jobs and carry heavy loads.

“Well, Ambrose certainly treated me like a queen. When we went out he would hold doors open for me to walk through. If I was carrying a parcel he would insist on taking it for me. He invited me to eat in restaurants where he called for the wine list and talked to the waiters without bordering to look at them. When the food came, those same waiters served me first, only coming to Ambrose second. And he behaved as though this was the way it should be, and I pretended I was used to it although the opposite was true. The way I was raised, only after all the men had eaten did the women sit down to share what was left. And it was the women who fetched the water and carried the heavy loads.”

Additionally, another area which shows a vivid contrast in the treatments of women in both Continents; Africa and Europe is in the carriage of husband's name by a woman in Africa. For European women, it is seen as a form of emancipation for women which they do not tolerate.

“I changed my name to his. It had become the fashionable thing to do among Africa women, to take our husband's names. Now, of course, your generation are all busy holding on to their fathers' names, to show how emancipated you all are....”

(e) Military Regimes And Civil War

Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor Stones** is all about the history of Sierra Leone. Forna will not have achieved her purpose in recounting the history of Sierra Leone if she had failed to narrate the experience of the Sierra Leone Civil War. Certainly, it is not only about the war but it is about the impacts of the war to its citizens and the country as a whole. One of the effects of Sierra Leone Civil War is its dislocation and hardship caused by its citizens. Besides, so many destructions of lives and property were experienced in our beloved country. In the mouth of Serah, one of the narrators, she narrates on the death of Redempta, her husband, children and a lot for as a result of the rebel attack in Freetown;

“From those same clouds a maelstrom was unleashed, and of the many lives destroyed by its rage, one was Redempta. Murdered, alongside her husband, her children and countless others, the day the rebel army stormed the city.” (P279)

Additionally, Asana through her story tells how drivers are hauled from their vehicles and how their properties are seized by the rebels as they travel to the city. Again, she recounts on how the men the rebels hold are burnt alive:

“The screams of the men as they burned must have been terrible, must have filled the air sent the birds and animals fleeing. And yet nobody hears them. Their killers are deaf to them.” (P289).

One vital experience Forna presents in her novel is the military regime in Sierra Leone and its effects in its citizenry. In the mouth of Serah, she narrates how the new president has helped to clean the City and the government. The NPRC Regime introduced the cleaning exercise which she brings in her narration:

“...Nobody wanted to be ruled by the old, fat President and his corrupt cronies and because the new, young President cleaned up the streets and emptied the gutters of filth....” (P265).

(f) Corruption

Corruption is a cancer to any nation and it is in all corners of our national activities. Corruption is dominant in Africa particularly in government process and for the quest for power. Candidly, most modern African writers will not do better in their literature if they fail to recount corrupt African leaders and their activities.

Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor Stones** which is a novel about Sierra Leone and its citizens has done better in highlighting the corrupt practices of Sierra Leonean society. It is ostensible to note that through Serah, we are exposed to how the military takes over government from the old president. Certainly, the intervention of the military is as a result of the corrupt practices perpetrated by the old -civilian -government.

“Nobody wanted to be ruled by the old, fat president and his corrupt cronies and because the new, young president and his corrupt cronies and because the new, young president....” (p265)

Again, another element of graft is seen on the elections in which Serah serves as a returning officer and she ends up voting more than the required number which leads to rigging and corruption:

”....So I spent the remainder of the time filling it up: creating signatures and using up the fingers of one hand and then the other and finally each of my toes to create fictional thumb prints....” (p174).

(g) Conflict Of Religious

Aminatta Forna’s **Ancestor Stones** explains the inception of some of the religious in Sierra Leone. Before the arrival of Islam and Christianity, Sierra Leoneans were not pagans neither without gods but they had their African religion and beliefs. Because of colonialism, the first set of religion that came to the country is Islam. When it was brought to the country through Guinea, they censured many and convicted Sierra Leonean to follow theirs. This is exactly what is chronicled in Aminatta forna’s beautiful text. Similarly, the arrival of Christianity in Sierra Leone brought the rivalry between Islam and Christianity. The rivalry is vividly evident in transfiguring the name of Mariama to Mary after she has been baptized and becomes a Christian.

3. Narrative Techniques

Whether as living humans or mythological figures, ancestors have always played an important role in the African popular and literary imagination. Sometimes, as in Amos Tutuola’s famous short novels, they directly influence events. More often, as in the works of Chinua Achebe, both living and dead ancestors are sages offering valuable advice. In the first work of fiction by Aminatta forna ,the author of **The Devil that Dance on the Water**, a well-received memoir about her family in sierra Leone .The ancestors play much more than an advisory role .Here, the four women who are Forna’s principal narrators are the novel’s central characters, at the heart of the action.

(a) Assorted Narrative Techniques

It is a device used by modern writers to convey their messages to suit their purposes. It is a narrative technique which combines or put two or more narrative techniques in a particular literature. Frankly, every narrative technique has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, to apply the strengths of all the narrative techniques and equally solve their weaknesses, the writers will use two or more techniques to achieve this purpose.

Aminatta Forna’s **Ancestor Stones** is an apt example for such techniques. It is a memoir of a Sierra Leonean family, Kholiffa family and by extension Sierra Leonean families. It can equally be said to be a memoir of the history of Sierra Leone. Forna will not perfectly give us such experiences as writer without this technique.

The novel will have been highly flawed and censured if she had attempted using a third person perspective. Besides, it will have been reprimanded if she had employed one character to tell all of these experiences. To succeed in its form of realism, she employs four different characters; Asana, Serah, Hawa and Mariama to unfold their experiences. The first person perspective is being used in a fashionable way. Abie who is the principal character presents stories to the readership not in a third person perspective but in the first person narrative which has shown the peculiarity of the novel.

(b) Epistolary Technique

Just like Mariama Ba’s **So Long a Letter**, Aminatta Forna’s **Ancestor Stones** incepts with a letter written to Abie from Alpha her cousin. The arrival of the letter is responsible for the movement of Abie, a young woman of African descent to leave England and travel to Sierra Leone to assume control of her grandfather’s coffee plantation. In the letter, it unfolds the long standing story which she is coming to chronicle. Just after she has received the letter,

she tends to trace the arc of the letter which she later realizes that it comes from Alpha. Again, the letter of Alpha unravels the effects of the civil war in Sierra Leone.

Additionally, Hawa writes letters to her brothers -Ibrahim and Idrissa. The purpose of these letters is to show how Hawa has been thinking and praying for her brothers: "This letter serves to remind you of your sister, who is always praying for your success" (p190).

Generally, all of the letters in the novel serve as a link to characters and their ideas.

(c) Prologue

Prologue is an introduction in literature and it introduces the content to the readership. The prologue in Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor stones** is being told by Abie in the year 2003. The chapter for the prologue is named **The women's Gardens**. The name of the chapter is a representation of what it is contained in it: "And so there I was, standing in the forest among the women's gardens, remembering my grandmothers." (p9)

The prologue shows the inception of Sierra Leone and how it was named by the Portuguese who are called Pothos and how they have disappeared leaving remnants of their stay. The prologue also shows the arrival of the narrator among the women's gardens and how she is welcomed by the four women: Asana ;daughter of Ya Namina , her grandfather's senior wife , Gentle Mary , Hawa and Seray , belly sister of the narrators father . The prologue is the inception of the narration of the experiences and plights of women in Sierra Leone.

(d) Epilogue

Epilogue is the conclusion in literature and the epilogue in Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor Stones** concludes the narration. It is done by Abie in 2003 and it is titled: **The Women's Gardens II**. Through the epilogue, Abie unveils what is meant to be a woman in Sierra Leone in the past. Seemingly, women in Sierra Leone are demeaned, raped and are treated with contempt. From the words of the narrator in the epilogue, it is unfortunate and painful to be a woman in Sierra Leone before this time. Sacrosantly, the position of women in Sierra Leone in this present era is much better.

"Many women from among my family and friends spent hours sharing their memories with me of how it was to live as a woman in our country's past" (p318).

4. Structure

Aminatta forna's **Ancestor stones** is structured in a form of assorted stories being told by every character. The novel is structured in to seven parts and every part has their peculiar chapters that are being chronicled by the character whose name is captured. The first part is called the **Family Tree** which is made up of one chapter known as **Butterflies**. The impact of this chapter is vividly not too lucid in the minds of the readership. However, the little impact that can be unveiled is it shows the relationship of members and the order in which the women are ranked.

In the tree, we know Gibril Kholifa is the father and head of Kholifa family. Again, we realize that Ya Namina is the most senior, seconded by Issata and Mamusu is the least ranked wife as she is the eleventh wife.

The second part of the novel is the **Prologue** which gives us a flashback in the text. It narrates how Abie has gone to her land to take care of Kholifa Plantation which she has known about through the letter of Alpha her cousin. The title of the prologue is called **Women's Gardens** which symbolizes a place where women share their experiences and plights in a male chauvinist society.

The third part is called **The SEEDS**. This part is made up of four chapters and each chapter is dedicated with a character who explains her experience. Each chapter is given a name which symbolizes her story. The first to tell her story is Asana: **Shadows of the Moon** and the last is Serah: **Woman palavar** which is named as a representation of her friend who is always a troublemaker. The name **SEEDS** symbolises the beginning which in their narrations give us the inception of the stories of their mothers.

The fourth part is also called **DREAM**. It is highly and equally symbolic which represents the aspirations of the Kholiffa family members and in particular the narrators. Asana starts the narration in 1941 and it is named **Bitter Kola** and the last chapter is told by Serah in 1956 and it is named **Red shoes**.

The fifth part is called **SECRETS** which is a representation of hiding or clandestine facts which the characters are coming to recount. It begins with Hawa in 1965 narrating her story and it is called **The music of flutes** and the fourth chapter is being narrated by Asana in 1985 and it is titled **Mambore**.

The sixth part is called; **CONSEQUENCES** which indicates the implications of the plights being told and the results of the maiden narration. It starts with Hawa in 1991 and it is called **Sugar** and ends with Mariama in 1999 which is called **Twelfth Night**.

The last and or final part is the **Epilogue** which is made up of one chapter which is narrated by Abie in 2003 and it is named: **The Women's Gardens ii**. The vitality of this part tells us that there has been a shift in the treatment and position of women in Sierra Leone; 'Many women from among my family and friends spent hours sharing their memories with me of how it was to live as a woman in our country's past (P318)

5. Diction/Use Of Vernacular

Forna's **Ancestor Stones** has not only been extolled because of its contents and structure but because of the diction she has chosen in conveying her message to the readership. The language used in **Ancestor Stones** is simple and well going. It is vivid as the readers will not get any problem in understanding the meaning of the literature. The diction is appropriate and depicts Africanise writing fiction which is also an element of realism in fictitious writing. She has used a number of vernaculars to depict Africanise literature like:

- yi di – He is there. She is there – (P8)
- Oporto/potho/porto- Portuguese One /European – (P8)
- Rotheron –The gossamer bridge (P10)
- Karabom-My grandmother – (P19)
- Obai – Chief- (P19)
- Thanto a Kuru- I thank God – (P37)

6. Figures Of Speech

A figure of speech is a powerful tool used by writers to help elevates their status in the writing genre. Frankly, it is strenuous for a writer to write a genius work without employing this technique. Aminatta Forna's **Ancestor Stones** is made up of preponderance of figures of speech. Certainly, I cannot discuss all of the figures of speech but I will be limited to few to save time and space.

Personification

“While from the ends of their elegant stalks pineapples nodded encouragingly , sweet potatoes and yams peeped from the earth and great hands of bananas reached down to them.”(P6)

“ Sharp grasses reached out to scratch my bare ankles” (P10)

“ Here and there scarlet berries danced against the green” (P10)

“Pain seeped into her limbs....” (P15)

Simile

“.....within its embrace like a woman in the crook of her lover’s arm” (P10)

Hyperbole

“I wanted to come to this world, to the place where things happen, I didn’t want to stay where I was .I always had big eyes for this world and I was born with them open” (P16)

“ High above us the monkeys cavorted and screamed our names. The crows laughed at our foolishness; a woodpecker darted ahead of us, rapping out a warning as it went :...”(P18)

Allusion

Forna in **Ancestor Stones** has used a lot of allusions to give evidence to her purpose of the novel. She has predominantly used both historical and biblical allusions. It is done to give the work a sense of realism. Mariama in the Chapter- **Stone (1931)** recalls a book she has read by a very famous Author who has written ugly things about the land. The author leaves in the country for a shorter period but yet she has written a story about us. This shows how Europeans only perceive Africans as barbaric and inhuman. This is similar to **Things Fall Apart** when the whites say our customs are bad: “How a man who doesn’t speak our tongue can says our customs are bad” Said Obierika.

Again, when Mariama is to be baptised, the biblical Ten Commandments is also brought to the novel as a form of allusion. Furthermore, a reference is made in the war in Italy in Europe and the destruction it caused. The purpose for this allusion is to draw and show the effect of war in any society.

Symbolism

Aminatta Forna’s **Ancestor Stones** is highly symbolic. The element of symbolism is established by the way she has craftily selected her characters and the themes. Kholiffa family symbolises the entire family structure in Sierra Leon and by extension African society. Therefore, the novel is not only about Kholiffa family but a representation of all families in Sierra Leone. Besides, the female characters – the narrators represent the women in Sierra Leone and by extension Africa and their stories represent the stories of all women in Africa. Again, Abie is a representation of Aminatta Forna, the author who has left the country but returned later in Sierra Leone.

Riddles/Myths And Superstition

Riddles, myths and superstition are pertinent elements which an Africa novel cannot go without. The presence of these shows the verisimilitude of the work of art. Certainly, Forna in **Ancestor Stones** has used them to her convenience. The first element of myth is seen in Asana’s story in the ‘**Shadows of the Moon**’ where her Karabom says she should greet in the morning until she has cleaned her mouth. When it is then done one day, Karabom has this to say; “People who grew thin and died were being eaten away inside by witches...” (P22)

An element of superstition is seen when Alusani and Asana are called by the names chosen for them by the diviner:

“ My mother and father called us by the names the diviner has chosen for us; Alusani and Asana’ (P19)

Another element is the visit of Asana’s mother to the Moriman and the worship of the stone by her mother. The Moriman instructs Asana’s mother to sweep up her rival’s footsteps and take the dust to him. Riddle is being seen between Alusani and Asana in “**Shadows of the Moon**’

“How do you carry water?’ I asked Alusani’ (P24).

7. Characterization

Asana

Asana is one who has recounted their plights and experiences in the novel. She is the daughter of Ya Namina who is the most senior wife of Gibril Kholiffa. She is the first born of her father but not her mother. This is because her father has inherited her mother from his uncle and her mother is a praying wife:

“I was the firstborn of my father. Not my mother. My mother was a praying wife. My father inherited her from his uncle.” (p16)

Asana is a twin whose partner is called Alusani and they are called by such because tradition demands that. She is also called Nurr, the true first born. This is because the women who witness their birth have left before the arrival of Alusani. They believe that she might return as children normally do who are the first born. She is called Nurr which means a thing to be discarded and which is worthless. Asana’s father, Gibril Kholiffa is a seasoned politician as he has aided chiefs to win elections in society. This is why the Obai gives their father people who can work in his plantation as a form of gratitude: “ These people had been given to our father by the Obai , because he had helped him win the chieftaincy elections....” (P21).

Asana is also called Yankay, the firstborn and it is lucid that Asana is always jealous of the care shown to the other half of her soul and longs for such affection to be shown to her. Asana is highly obstinate and always wants to do things in her own way. She doesn’t heed to advice as her mother gives her advice to be meticulous of what she does and her relationship. Her mother longs for her to be of what her mother is. She wishes that she becomes the first and most senior wife of her husband. She startlingly doesn’t consider her mother’s advice worthy and hence she throws herself to the opposite:

“I refused to listen to my mother. All I wanted was to get as far away from her as I could, you understand? And so I did the opposite.” (P107)

Asana’s husband is Osman Iscandari. She is the antithesis of the experience of her mother. She is the third wife to her husband and interestingly, Osman is a man who has not occupied a better space in the social ladder. He is not from a ruling family, nor was he wealthy, respected nor is he holding an honourable position in the men’s society. She is loved by her husband who is evidenced by the worth of her bride gift which everybody in the town talks about:

“Behind me came the load bearers carrying the luxuries brought with my bride gift , a bride gift so great it was the talk of the talk”(P108).

Asana’s co wives are: Balia, Ngadie and Mabinty. She at some points experiences loneliness by her husband which according to her strains her from conceiving a child. She is someone with pride which is shown by the way she behaves to her husband. Her husband is the only son of his mother and Asana works for a construction firm. The name of her Karabom is called Kadie who has died.

Asana is loved by her father but that does not influence her father to flaunt the customs when she has a dispute with Osman Iscanderi, her husband:

“I looked up at him, remembering how I used to ride on his shoulders, how I rode on his shoulders the day we came to his place to find the village. He spoiled me so much people called me his pet deer.”(p121).

Asana is eventually a widow and her second husband dies just after the birth of Alpha, her second child. She loves him so much because of his care to her. Her second husband is seemingly a politician as he loves discussing politics with his friend Pa Brima and her second husband is quick to go into anger. Her first daughter is called Kadie who marries to Ansumana and later travels to Guinea to live their life. She is granddaughter to Adama, the daughter of Kadie and Ansumana.

Mariama

Mariama is another vital character that has helped the evolution of the author’s perspective. Accordingly, her mother is Sakie who is third in the rank of Gibril’s wives. She is also called Mary which she gets after her Baptism. Changing her original name to Mary is a justification of religious stratification which is a theme that runs throughout the web of Forna’s novel. She has no belly brother like other narrators in the novel. She is a helping girl who usually helps her mother in the trading of snuff. In such, she is a trader who has done well in that regards:

“My sisters and I tried to make the snuff instead. We searched for the pestle and mortar and ground the tobacco, lubi, cloves.”(P49)

Her mother is a monotheist who worships stones and it is why the chapter is named the stone in representation of the act or religious belief. Mariama is a friendly character who has a friend called Marie Palava which shows that she is a troublesome person. Her religion belief changes to Christianity after she has baptised and named Mary. After the process, she becomes a student in the School of Nuns. After the death of her mother, she is nurtured by Ya Sallay who later becomes her mother. She is giving a scholarship by the missionaries to qualify as a teacher:

“Missionaries has brought me here. Given me a scholarship so at last I could qualify as a teacher....” (P204)

When she arrives in England she writes a letter to Ya Sallay and Ya Jeneba to relay information about her arrival in England. She is a spinster.

Hawa

Hawa is the daughter of Tenkamu who is the sixth wife of Gibril Kholiffa. Unlike Mariama, she has two brothers who are Idrissa and Ibrahim. Hawa’s mother is tall and her mother is the only wife her father has chosen for himself. Hawa frequently complains of her ill luck which is responsible for her state and position. She has a friend who is called Finda. She is a respectful character which is shown in her behaviour to Ya Isatta when she bows her head modestly and thanks her when she is talking to her about the way her mother looks like her.

Hawa’s husband is called Lansana whom she gives three children who are all boys. However, she loses two who are girls. Her husband is also called Okurgba which represents a warrior fighter. She is later in love with Khalil which relationship sparks so many controversies among family members of Hawa Kholiffa. In fact, her father censures her that she has brought shame to the family. However, Khalil later betrays Hawa whom she has sacrificed her happiness and dearly loves him by going away with Zainab who she finds for Khalil and leaves her in isolation. Hawa’s son later becomes a soldier who joins her brother abroad.

Serah

Serah is also the daughter of Gibril Kholiffa and Saffie who is the tenth wife of Gibril Kholiffa. Her mother is secured for Gibril Kholiffa by Ya Namina who happens to be the most senior wife. Her belly brother is Yaya and Ya Memso is their mother closest friend among the wives. She has a beautiful mother whom she resembles. What is startling about Serah and her mother is the bride price of her mother which is equal to one carat diamond. However, Serah does not like her father for her mother because of his behaviour to her. Serah’s teacher is called

Mrs Silk who teaches them to be bold when they speak. This has given her an indelible quality but it is censured by her grandmother: "Our teacher, Mrs Silk, was not this short. Not at all. For a start there was the way she looked at you, straight in the eye. And she would ask you to look her in the face too, when you spoke. It got me in trouble with my grandmother, who slapped me for being so bold...." (P164)

Serah is befriended to Hannah Williams in which they attend the same school. She is also a very good dancer which she displaces when they always dance with her friend, Hannah Williams. She graduates with honours in West Africa School Certificate and gets a scholarship to study in England. In the elections to name her country a republic, she works as the returning officer which she rigs which is an act of corruption and tantamount to treason according to Sierra Leone 1991 Constitution Act No.6. She works in the election with Jeneba as returning officers which after the elections they depart and later when Jeneba returns becomes Information Officer of the National Students' Union. She is a beautiful woman who becomes attaches with Ambrose who has treated her with the utmost esteem which is in contrast with the way other men treat women in Africa. In the restaurant, Ambrose treats her like queen: 'Well, Ambrose certainly treated me like queen....'(P215) She is married to Ambrose but not loved by Ambrose's family. She works at Lyons Coffee Shop to help finance Ambrose studies. She has a friend called Janneh. Her husband Ambrose after his course jobs in the office of the Attorney – General where he is helping to draft new Acts of Parliament. She also befriends Hannah which leads to her disputes with Ambrose as it is gossiped that Ambrose is in affairs with Hannah.

Abie

Abie is the narrator of both the Prologue and Epilogue who has left England to trace the arc of the letter written to her by her cousin, Alpha to come and take care of her grandfather's plantation who is Gibril Kholiffa a rich man. Her husband is a Portuguese whom she has given children for. Looking at Forna's **Ancestor Stones**, one will be tempted to say and which is not a flawed statement that, Abie represents Aminatta Forna, the author who brings the history and experiences of Sierra Leone and its women explain to her by four women: Asana, Hawa, Serah, and Mariama who represent the womenfolk.

Other Characters

Gibril Kholiffa is the breadwinner of Kholiffa family. He is the grandfather of Abie and the father of the four narrators. He marries eleven wives in which he inherits the most senior wife, Ya Namina from his uncle. The least wife is Mamusu and it is only Hawa's mother, Tenkamu that he has chosen for himself. He is therefore a respecter of custom and tradition. Gibril Kholiffa is a rich and respectable person in the society. He is highly placed in the social strata and it is what is responsible for his many women as he can take care of them. He is the owner of the Kholiffa plantation and he is a politician who has aided chief to win elections and it is why chiefs help him with people to help in his plantation. Ya Namina is a vital character who is the most senior of all the wives. She is the mother of Asana and Alusani and the grandmother of Alpha and Kadie and the great grandmother of Adama, the daughter of Kadie and Ansumana. She is the mother in law of both Osman Iscandari and Ansumana. She is one who advises Asana on the relationship to follow and want Asana to be the first wife of her husband but it goes the foil because of Asana none listen attitude.

Sakie is another wife of Gibril and she is the third in the rank of Gibril's wives. She is the mother of Mariama and she is a worshiper of stones. Saffie is the tenth wife of Gibril Kholiffa and the mother of Serah and Yaya. She is the only wife that is secured by Ya Namina for Gibril. She is highly beautiful and it is why her bride price is equal to one carat diamond. She is the mother in law of Ambrose the husband of Serah.

Tenkamu is the sixth wife of Gibril Kholiffa and the mother of Hawa, Idrissa and Ibrahim. She is the mother in law of Lansana and Khalil the husbands of Hawa respectively. Osman Iscandari is the husband of Asana who also has four wives and Asana is the third wife. Unlike Gibril, Osman Iscandari is not rich nor is he placed in the highest social ladder. His other wives are Balia Ngadie and Mabinty. Ambrose is the husband of Serah and he is a descent gentleman who always treats Serah with respect. This is seen by the way he treats Serah in the restaurant with

esteem. Alpha is the cousin of Abie who sends the letter to her to come and take care of the plantation farm.

Conclusion

The fiction **Ancestor Stones** by Aminatta Forna is brilliantly tailored of giving time frame of events which aids to illuminate the verisimilitude of the fiction just like Daniel Defoe **Robinson Crusoe**. Shrewdly, each caption is given a name of the one narrating the story, its era and a symbolic caption which helps to underpin the meaning and purpose of the Novel.

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