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**A Novel Approach  
to Education and Development:  
Insights from African Women Writers**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Masters of Philosophy  
in Development Studies at Massey University.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the contribution of creative writing to the interdisciplinary academic field of Development Studies. The theoretical framework of the thesis is guided by contemporary development perspectives, notably the concept of empowerment within Gender and Development literature, which emphasise the importance of seeking women's voices and listening to their views on issues of concern for themselves and their communities. Reading women's creative writing is one way of hearing women's voices.

Three novels by African women are examined for their insightful treatment of education, a key development issue. These novels are The Joys of Motherhood by Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta, Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions, and Our Sister Killjoy by Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana. Educational themes that feature in the discussion and analysis of the novels are the constraints that African women face in making decisions about their daughters' futures; the sexism and alienation that girls encounter in their pursuit of Western schooling; and a critique, in the context of neocolonialism, of the educated African elite who emigrate to developed countries, constituting a "brain-drain".

The three novels make a valuable contribution to understanding educational issues in developing countries, particularly those facing girls, and suggests broad principles upon which future efforts to address people's needs in this area could be based. Above all the thesis concludes that fiction is a powerful vehicle of communication and, as such, challenges Development Studies to broaden its interdisciplinary approach still further to include the study of fiction by people from developing countries.

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