

Emergence of New Feminine Identity in Africa: The Case of AMA ATA Aidoo's Changes

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ABSTRACT- *This article discusses the new feminine identity as reflected in the characterization of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes. It postulates that Aidoo, in her novel, has advocated a paradigm shift with respect to how society views women. The article argues that feminism is not limited to, and is not the preserve of, only female writers, but also male writers who write about the plight of women. It is the view of this article that the change of mindset about women Aidoo calls for, is seen through, and from the perspective of, the six female characters in the Novel. The article takes a textual analysis approach to examine these female characters from the perspective of education and tradition. The article concludes that through these female characters, the educated and the uneducated, Ama Ata Aidoo is calling for a certain change of mind towards how the African society sees the woman-calling for a new feminine identity.*

Keywords- *Feminism; womanist; African Feminist; African-American feminist.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary scholars are yet to come to common grounds as to what feminism really is. Many attempts have been made to answer the question 'What is feminism?'. With a set of core propositions and beliefs central to all feminist theories, the task is made extremely difficult because many of the different strands of feminism seem to be not only divergent, but sometimes forcefully opposed. The confusion of arriving at a unique and all-embracing definition becomes more pronounced when one tries to consider feminism from its historical origin. Freedman (2001) quotes Fraisse (1995) as have argued that

The term feminism is a relatively modern one – there are debates over when and where it was first used, but the term 'feminist' seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients, who were perceived as thus suffering from 'feminization' of their bodies (Fraisse 1995)

Fraisse (1995: 316) further notes that historically, feminism was used in the medical profession to signify a feminization of men, but in political terms it was first used to describe a virilization of women. This type of gender confusion was something that was clearly feared in the nineteenth century, and it can be argued that it is still present in a modified form in today's societies where feminists are sometimes perceived as challenging natural

differences between men and women. It is interesting to note, though, that feminist was not at first an adjective used by women to describe themselves or their actions, and one can certainly say that there was what we today would call 'feminist' thought and activity long before the term itself was adopted. (Cited in Freedman, 2001: P.2)

Feminism is thus a term that emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding an amelioration in their social position. On this score, Delmar (1986) opines that Even after the word feminism was coined, it was still not adopted as a term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women's rights. Even many of the women's rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not call themselves feminist: the term feminism had a restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups.

In an article entitled "The House Divided: Feminism in African Literature", Charles Nnoli-a professor at the University of Port Harcourt-states that the African feminist literary scene is not whole. There are what he calls feminist, womanists, accommodationist, and reactionist. To Charles, the concept is so fragmented that one cannot really think of it as one whole. But in an interview with Maria Frias, Ama Ata Aidoo flatly disagrees with Charles' assertion and says;

I suspect that when people do not want to deal with an issue, they look for lack of coherence in the issue itself. This is what in American English is called "nit-picking"-the fundamental issue is, are we going to develop our own feminist

consciousness? It does not matter if some of us are womanists. Are we feminist? My point is that with all ideological thoughts there are bound to be disagreements, different shapes. If he thinks that that is what he sees, fine, but I do not think it is the most important, essential commentary anybody can make on the state of the feminist debate in Africa (1998:Page 28)

Aidoo further notes;

Like I said there are womanists, and feminists, but the most important thing is: what are we all trying to get at? If we are all trying to get at the development of society's awareness about the position of women in this world-and what to do about it, how to get women to develop-that's the important issue. If this is what we are about then, frankly, it is not relevant at all whether we are feminists, or womanists, or fundamentalists. Who cares? That's where I come from. I am not going to stop talking to somebody because she is a womanist (ibid Page 28)

Left to Aidoo alone, and the position this article also endorses, all the fragmentation of feminism-womanist, feminist, African feminism, African-American feminism, etc-are not relevant. What is important is that the plight of women is given a lot of attention, and to the extent that all these different shades of feminism are out for the same goal, she cares less.

Jane Freedman(2001:1) gives us a roadmap into solving the problem of what I call 'feminism fragmentation' and the resultant myriad of definitions. He observes that for us to solve the problem of feminism fragmentation, we should start from the assumption that we cannot define what 'feminism' is, but only try to pick out common characteristics of all the many different 'feminisms'. Any attempt to provide a baseline definition of a common basis of all feminisms may start with the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. Furthermore, one could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women (page 1)

It is precisely what Freedman has eloquently espoused-feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women- that Aidoo's feminism finds its voice. Indeed, in almost all Aidoo's writings- *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), *Anowa* (1970); *No Sweetness Here* (1979), *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* (1999); *Our Sister Kill joy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977)-it is the plight of the African woman that pre occupies her mind.

2. AFRICAN FEMINISM: AN EXEGESIS

One does not have to go far in order to understand what an African feminism is. It is a type of feminism innovated by African women that specifically addresses the conditions, experiences and needs of the African woman.

In 2006, over two hundred women met in Accra, Ghana, to develop what they call a Charter for Feminist Principles for African Feminist, the preamble of which reads

We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists, we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "ifs", "buts" or "however". We are Feminists. Full stop.

The charter was essentially to give 'self' to the African woman and make her champion her own destiny. A Ugandan writer Josephine Ahikire(2008) describes the purpose of the Charter more forcefully and more beautifully. She writes

... The Charter seeks to re-energize and reaffirm African feminism in its multiple dimensions. The preamble to the Charter is an audacious positioning of African feminism as an ideological entity in the African body politic. The charter was collectively crafted as a critical movement-building tool, particularly around the desire to affirm commitment to feminist principles and chart a course to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent. In many ways, the Charter set out to reverse the conservative dynamics that work to undermine the critical edge of African feminism, creating a sense of urgency about the need for the feminist movement to re-assert and re-energize itself.

African feminism, and to a large extent this Charter, became necessary, in part, due to white Western feminism's exclusion of the experiences of the black and the continental African woman. White Western feminisms

do not take into account the particular issues black women face at the intersection of both their blackness and their womanhood.

But to distinguish clearly between white feminism and what exactly African feminism stands for, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997:4) writes that 'African feminism owes its origin to different dynamics than those that generated western feminism. It has largely been shaped by African Women's resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture...it does not grow out of bourgeois individualism and the patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrializing societies... The debates in many Western countries about essentialism, the female body, and radical feminism are not characteristic of the new African feminism. Rather the slowly emerging African feminism is distinctively heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many "bread, butter, culture, and power" issues'.

With this, Gwendolyn has hit the nail right on the head as to the nature and form of African Feminism. African feminism is neither essentialism nor radical, nor does it concern itself with the female body (as some western writers will associate feminism with lesbianism), but is the one that concerns itself with "bread, butter, culture and power"

In this way, Gwendolyn is educating her readers on the concerns of the educated African woman-what this article refers to as *The New Famine Identity*. The new educated African women are concerned with job and occupation (bread and butter). They must have equal job opportunities with men. They must earn and possess the same with men. The kind of cultural practices that keep the African woman at the bottom of the social ladder must be re-considered. The African woman must be able to hold a political power. These are the values around which the new feminine identity (the concern of this article) is built.

But one needs to ask: Do all African female writers consider themselves as feminist? It is sad to note that the answer to this question is in the negative. One would have thought, as Aidoo thinks, that being an African woman will automatically come with a defense of who you are in your writings. When Maria Friase put the same question to Aidoo that other African female writers think she is not feminist, she responded as follows:

MF: *In the same article, Nmolin mentions you as one of the many African women who systematically write about women's issues but "deny involvement in the feminist movement in their public utterances". He quotes from one of your articles.*

AAA: *But that is so ridiculous! Here is Nmolin saying that I deny in public my feminism when they are marketing me in Europe as the foremost African feminist. . . And Nmolin says I do not want to say I am a feminist at all! That's ridiculous! If he is using that article to back a*

statement, then he has completely misread me

MF: *Efua Sutherland also mentions that African women writers like you, who write about women's issues, regret being called feminist*

AAA: *That's equally ridiculous! I've always said I am a feminist! People are making a fundamental mistake. We are women. A woman writer writes about women naturally. . . Now that I have been called the foremost African feminist, it is a bit awkward for me when African critics who do not want to take that I am a feminist write such things about me because, really, that is wishful thinking. They don't want to say I'm a feminist, and I suspect that is because people have not clarified the whole issue of lesbianism, and where it impinges on feminism. And I genuinely think that when they say I am not a feminist, they are saying: Oh, she cannot be because feminists are lesbians. It is there, unspoken. Because how more loudly should I declare my feminism? But I always make it clear that feminism is an ideological view point. Lesbianism is a sexual orientation, and the two should not be mixed at all. But people do not want to deal with the dichotomy, the difference. In Africa people just cringe, but feminism has nothing to do with lesbianism.(culled from " An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: "I Learnt my First Feminist Lessons in Africa" BY Maria Frías,pages 29-30)*

Even though Aidoo, from the above interview, has indicated that she is a feminist pure and natural, and holds the view that 'a woman writer writes about women naturally' her other female counterparts hold a different view. Some of them think that even though they write on women issue, they are not feminist. The critic Molar Ogundipe in her famous essay, ' *The Female Writer and Her Commitment* ' lashes at these African writer unapologetically. She writes:

But many of the African female writers like to declare that they are not feminist, as if it were a crime to be a feminist. These denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Ba' .I would put this down to the successful intimidation of African women by men over the issues women's liberation and feminism. Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term "feminist" a

bad name. Yet nothing could be more feminist than writings of these writers, in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society {(Guardian, Lagos, Dec.21, 1983),Cited in A.N Mensah,2012,P.106-107}

Following the above discussion, it is the position of this article that so far as a writer (male or female) raises issues relating to the unequal position of women in society, and to the extent that the writer advocates for (African) women's rights on the grounds of equality of sexes, that writer is a feminist and his/her writings to be considered in the light of African feminism. It is in the light of this that this article considers the following male authors and their books as feminist, even though they themselves may not have called themselves such.

Sembene Ousmane who, in *God's bits of wood* (1970), makes women a major force in the social transformation achieved by workers during the strike on the Dakar-Bamako rail way line. There is also the Sumali writer, Nuruddin Farah who in novels like *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *Sardines*(1981) focuses on the restricted conditions in which women live and against which they fight in Somalia. Finally, we can cite Anthills of the Savannah which Chinua Achebe makes a female character one of the leaders in the fight against post-colonial dictatorship in Africa.

Regarding the female writers, there are many more to mention. To cite a few examples, one can mention Buchi Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood*, as well as the works of Ama Darko in novels such as *The Housemaid* and *Faceless* has been exploring, generally, the disadvantages, and often quite precarious situation, of under privilege women and girls in Ghana.

Is Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* therefore a feminist novel? This is not a question that should detain us for a long time. "To beguile the time; look like the time", says William Shakespeare. Ama Ata Aidoo's writings cannot be different from what she represents. She is a feminist, and she writes like one. A.N. Mensah in his Introduction to Literature agrees with this assertion, and concludes thus; Given its profound analysis of the challenges confronting the educated women in Ghana in her search to balance the competing demands of being a wife, mother and a professional person, there can be no doubt that Ama Ata Aidoo's novel, *Changes*, can justly be described as feminist.(2012:107)

The Emergence of a New Feminine Identity

To a great extent, African women are being relegated to the background in the social, political, and economic arenas of their societies. This has had a negative effect on the development of the continent.(Kehinde:2006) .The position of women in African society has become a major issue which has attracted the concerns of both male and female writers. The African woman faces a lot of discrimination on the social, political and cultural milieu

they find themselves. The general perception is that in the midst of men, "women have no say"

Ama Ata Aidoo gives us a glimpse of how women are disregarded in the Ghanaian society in the first page of her book, *Changes*. We meet Esi, the main character. She is a staff of department of urban statistics. She is on her way to Lingar, a company that deals with travelling arrangements, to check on some documents for a conference she and her other two colleagues are attending, because the secretary, a male, is not available. Her car breaks down several times on the way, and she is subjected to hostile jeering by male taxi drivers;

. . . All other drivers were unsympathetic. They blew their horns, and some taxi drivers shouted the usual obscenities about women drivers (P. 1)

In more strong terms, Aidoo condemns this male domination and discrimination when she writes

. . . Men were the first gods in the universe, and they were devouring gods. The only way they could yield their best- and sometimes their worst too- was if their egos were sacrificed to. The bloodier the sacrifice, the better.
(*Changes*:126)

Men would even go as far as asking the wives to change their jobs if is more rewarding than theirs. They do this in order to dominate over them and make their wives always appear "under" them. Aidoo decries this situation and writes

. . . quite often, the first thing a man who marries a woman mainly for the quickness of her brain tries to do is to get her to change her job to a more 'reasonable' one. Or to a part-time, not a full-time job. The pattern never never changes. And then the "reasonable" job is often quite dull too. And no part-time job has the stimulation that its full-time version can give . . . when a woman changes jobs in a such a manner,. . . her vision begins to shrink, and she begins to get bored and dissatisfied.(*Changes* ; 49)

Does Aidoo thinks this situation should be changed? Yes! She writes

Do I think it must always be so? Certainly not! It can be changed-changes, (the title of the book under review).It can be better. Life on this earth need not always be some human beings gods and other beings sacrificial animals. Indeed, that can be changed. But it will take so much. No, not time. There has always been enough time for anything anyone ever really wanted to do. What it will take is a lot of thinking and a great deal of doing.
(*Changes*:126)

Eighteen years down the line,(from the year of publication of *Changes* to the year of formulation of the African Union Gender Policy) the African Union, in their gender policy, proposes the same change of mind set and attitude towards

women Aidoo speaks about. Relevant portions of the policy reads;

While it is evident that women substantially contribute to economic, social and political development as well as in environmental management, they have not benefited from economic growth and development, continue to be outside the decision making sphere and barely enjoy any human rights. Progress must be made through fruitful dialogue between civil society and governments, backed by political will, reflecting in changing constitutional, legal and social platforms through which more women can exercise voice and accountability in decision-making that affects their well-being. Nonetheless, women still face discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization and do not share equally the benefits from production. (African Union Gender Policy, 2009, p. 3)

The purpose of the policy was, and still is, to establish a clear vision and makes commitments to guide the process of gender mainstreaming and woman empowerment to influence policies, procedures and practices which will accelerate achievement of gender equality, gender justice, non-discrimination and fundamental human right in Africa-the very same thing Aidoo advocates.

All these attempts are geared towards carving a new image for the African woman, what I call the new feminine identity. The kind image that puts them at par with their male counterparts, in terms education, employment, honour, respect and independence. That is the new feminine identity Aidoo calls for in all her writings.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to establish the various ways women have been represented in the novel, which in itself is the author's way of championing the course of women and calling for a new mind set for the African woman. Marginalization of the African woman, and the ways of salvaging her from it, is another issue that preoccupies the author's mind. The study would therefore examine the extent to which this marginalization of the African woman has been presented in the book

Research Questions

1. In what various ways have the females characters been presented in the novel?
2. To what extent is marginalization of females characters reveal in the novel?

4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To explore feminism values demonstrated by the female characters in the novel, the study identified all the female characters in the novel, and a sketch made on them.

Having subjected the novel to a comprehensive examination, the analysis was done in the way this article refers to as' Name, Textual Evidence, Feminist Approach (NTEFA) manner,

Where $N=FA$

$N=3(TE)$

Therefore, $N+3(TE)=FA$

But, $3(TE) \neq FA-N$

The study examines the female characters, first, by their names (N) and from a feminist approach (FA) through a textual evidence(TE) of feminism values reflected in these characters. When the name of a character is identified, three different textual evidence will be elucidated (3(TE)), both of which are grounded in the feminist approach (FA).

5. RESEARCH APPROACH

The researchers adopted the qualitative research method. Stokrochi (1997) defines qualitative research approach as a systematic process of describing, analyzing and interpreting insights discovered in everyday life. Stokrocki (1997) further refers to qualitative research as naturalistic inquiry, which is a careful study of human activity in its natural and complex state.

Generally, it involves the description, analysis and interpretation of written or spoken data. According to Stokrochi(1997), qualitative research approach is field focused, interpretive in nature, expressive in language, highly detailed, persuasive and finally considers the researcher as an instrument. The researchers, thus, believe that this research approach will help to give a fair picture of the feminism ideologies demonstrated by the female characters in the novel, Changes, through the feminist approach.

6. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

The study is pivoted around two inter related theories-Character and characterization theory and the Wolf Theory. In literature, a story cannot be complete without any character in it. Characters are names of animals or human beings who feature in a literary work. A character has some sort of identity revealed through appearance, conversation, action, name and possibly thoughts. In narrative or dramatic technique, it usually uses the term characters and characterizations. In the theory of character and characterization, authors rely on two approaches to provide and consider a character in their literary work. They are the direct exposition (telling) approach and indirect approach (character actions) (Gill, 1995).

According to Gill (1995), the direct approach is where the author tells readers what the character does, feels, thinks and says at any given time. Here, the author makes a comment about the character and his actions or speeches and interprets those actions and speeches. On the other hand, the indirect approach also known as the dramatic approach is where the character introduces himself or herself to readers on the basis of what he or she says, does

or feels. This means that the author does not explicitly describe the character (direct approach) but rather allow the characters to show their own selfhood through their verbal and non-verbal actions coupled with the events that happen in the course of the story.

Gill (1995) stipulates that character and characterization are different. A Character is a person or an animal in a literary work while characterization is the way in which a character is created. From these distinctions, characterization is a method and character is the product. Thus, we can conclude that the theory of characterization is a method or process used by an author to create characters. Characters are products of characterization being made by authors. Gill (1995) further states that characters are people or animals created by a playwright and imagined by audience or readers.

This theory of character and characterization will therefore be explored in this research as the study seeks to examine the characterization of female characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's novel, *Changes*, from the feminist approach.

Regarding the Wolf theory, Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) makes an outstanding analysis about the image of women in a literary work. According to Woolf theory (1929), women are marginalized as creatures with no education, no money, an ideological antipathy, unoriginal, private and domestic housewife, girl or servant who take care of household. This Woolf's theory will be pivotal in our analysis as Ama Ata Aidoo's literary work, *Changes* is embedded with this ideology.

7. DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question 1

In what various ways have the females characters been presented in the novel?

ESI SEKYI

i. Education

Esi Sekyi is presented to readers as the heroine of the novel, *Changes*. She is projected by the author as a well-educated and hardworking woman. As already known in our traditional society, women are proposed only to be good wives and mothers who stay in private and domestic sphere to take care of the household. Women are not generally allowed to have higher education; they assume that it is enough for women to have ability of reading, writing and counting. Considering the fact that Esi has a master's degree and genuinely enjoys her work as a public servant with the aim of advancing in her profession are not typical of women from a patriarchal point of view. The author through these character traits of Esi wants to send a message to the world that women can aspire to greater heights as far as their education and career are concerned. This is not the preserve right of men but women as well.

ii. Financial prowess

Esi Sekyi is introduced to readers as a career woman whose job pays more than the husband consequently making her become a paradigm of an economically

independent woman. She owns the matrimonial home because of her strong financial background. This fact really demonstrate how the author projects the ideology of feminism through Esi. How often in our traditional society do we see a woman whose job pays more than the husband, and even owns the matrimonial home? The author believes that this marital role which is usually associated with men can also be taken over by women. This is purely a high sense of feminism displayed by Ama Ata Aidoo in her characterization of the principal character, Esi Sekyi.

iii. Independence of a woman

Esi is portrayed to readers as an independent woman. She proves to be an independent character both financially and mentally. In line with this character trait of Esi, she divorces Oko, her first husband on account of marital rape and pressure to produce many children. She again divorces Ali, her second husband, because Ali fails to give her the needed attention as a wife. She divorces them in order to secure her independence as a woman free from marital frustrations. However, she chooses to stick to Ali as her sexual partner though they have divorced.

It takes a feminist woman like Esi to be able to divorce Oko and Ali with an unequivocal intention of living an independent life where her priority will be on her career and free from traditional boundaries imposed by marriage. To her, marriage should not be a phenomenon of slavery but an exercise of equal rights and freedom where both male and female should have the same leeway to operate. This sends a clear picture that Ama Ata Aidoo characterizes Esi from a feminist approach.

Again, in the process of Esi pursuing her career and desires, she in many occasions demonstrates that she wants to love and be loved. She fights for the love and freedom that she needs from her new husband, Ali. In African society, especially in marriage, many women are criticised and frustrated by their husbands in their wives quest to advance and pursue their career and desires respectively. In the process, many married women are denied of love and support by their husbands. As a consequence, conflicts, criticisms, frustrations and even divorce among others are resulted. The author hides behind Esi through the feminist approach to campaign that women can love and also be loved in their ambition to climb high the social ladder. Inasmuch as men love and expected to be loved in these same circumstances, so do the women who are also human.

OPOKUYA DARKWA

i. A working mother

She is a state-registered nurse and a wife of Kubi. Ama Ata Aidoo characterises her as a dedicated wife, loving mother, educated and financially sound hardworking nurse. She plays the role also as an educated Ghanaian woman whose life style gives us a balanced view as far as Esi is concerned. She is a Christian and a worker, but unlike Esi she keeps and protects her marriage. She

understands her husband's demand for children, and they have four. She and her husband have one car, and she does not mind sharing the car with her husband, and it is he who drives the car most of the times.

Opokuya Darkwa struggles to manage time out of her tedious working schedule as a nurse to care for her large family though the two demands take their toll on her emotional well-being. Opokuya always closes work very tired and come home to cook. While Opokuya manages to fulfil all of the roles demanded of her as a woman, Kubi, a representative of traditional patriarchal figure, fails to help the wife domestically and generally treats the family with contempt. The author uses Opokuya's traditional role as a mother and wife and Kubi's male chauvinist figure as a husband to make a strong case that women also deserve to be loved, respected and supported by their husbands as far as the running of the matrimonial home is concerned.

ii. Love and support

Opokuya proves herself as an epitome of love, care, support, comfort and companionate woman who frequently sacrifices her own needs for others make her much more a traditional figure. The author uses these exceptional character traits often associated with womanhood to make a strong case that men come no close to women in terms of these humanitarian qualities. Thus, men should not see women as nonentities but special gift from God heavily endowed with enviable qualities to rub shoulders with men

iii. Education/financial prowess

Like Esi, Opokuya is educated and has her own career that is personally and financially rewarding. This always makes her fight for her freedom in order to pursue her career as a nurse. Through this characterization of Opokuya, Ama Ata Aidoo is indoctrinating her female colleagues to become educationally and economically empowered as the only means to fight for their social, mental, religious, political and economic emancipation from their patriarchal male counterpart.

Ama Ata Aidoo demonstrates her campaign for women's economic empowerment once again through the characterization of Opokuya Darkwa. This is evidenced in the novel when Opokuya decides to resolve her morning disputes with her husband by obtaining her own car showcasing her mental and financial independence. Thus, the author presents to the whole world that women should always fight for their mental and financial independence from men.

Research Question 2

To what extent is the marginalization of female characters in the novel?

FUSENA

i. Being forced to abandon her further studies

Fusena is Ali's first wife whom he has known since childhood. After her marriage to Ali and eventually giving birth to her first child, Fusena abandons her career and education to satisfy the wish of her husband. Her burning desire to become a university graduate is thwarted by Ali

on the promise that he can earn enough money to support the family single-handedly.

ii. Being forced to accept a rival

Ali takes Esi, a university graduate, as his second wife despite Fusena's opposition against the idea. What disturbs her most is the fact that Ali marries a university graduate as second wife while he prevents her from completing her university education. As a tragic figure, she sacrifices her independence, education and career for a patriarchal husband who not only takes a second wife but also engages in multiple affairs with numerous women.

iii. Being forced to stop her career

Fusena abandons her career and education. She longs to finish school and get her degree but is constantly held back by Ali, who insists that he can earn enough money to support the family

Fusena's character and identity as a woman change throughout the course of the novel. Before she gets married, she is an intelligent and ambitious young woman. She wants to complete her degree and continue her teaching career. However, once Fusena marries Ali, her world is quickly restricted. She bears one child, and then another. With Ali studying abroad, Fusena is relegated to the home, where she remains until Ali purchases a kiosk for her to operate. Upon hearing of Ali's decision to remarry, she immediately asks him if the woman he is considering to be his second wife has a university degree. By asking that question, Fusena reveals the degree to which her life's ambitions have been frustrated and abandoned for the sake of her marriage and children. Despite her ambition and strong will, Fusena is relegated to the role of a dependent housewife.

Moreover, while Ali is staying abroad, Fusena is relegated to the home as a dependent housewife whose daily routine is to take care of the children and run the matrimonial home. Fusena reveals the degree to which her life's ambitions have been frustrated and abandoned for the sake of marriage and childbearing. Ama Ata Aidoo uses the character sketch of Fusena as a pulpit to preach that male chauvinist societies should refrain from defining the identity of women by marriage and childbearing. To the author, it is about time women stopped sacrificing their career, independence and education for the sake of marriage and childbearing.

8. DISCUSSIONS

All in all, the above positive character traits of Esi projected by the author are unconventional about women in our traditional society. On the contrary, women are expected to be physically and mentally weak, vulnerable, ill-educated and dependent consequently becoming a liability on their male counterpart for survival. Thus, Ama Ata Aidoo presents Esi Sekyi to readers as a woman who has the same personality traits typical of men in our traditional society. Through these character traits, Esi Sekyi is seen as a prototype of a man not a woman. Thus, Esi comes to represent the emergence of a new feminine

identity –one that can compete equally with men in all facets of life.

In the same vein, Opokuya's frequent misunderstanding with Kubi over the use of their car and his husband's inordinate demand for children demonstrate to a higher degree how men in traditional societies define women by childbearing and submissiveness. By this, the author establishes a point from a feminist perspective that women should take courage to also fight for their interest. They should be vocal in marital decision-making processes in order not to allow the male sex to impose their ideas on them against their will. Additionally, they should not allow men to define them by childbearing and timidity.

Ama Ata Aidoo uses the characterization of Fusena to caution young women to resist any attempt by their male counterpart to stop them from pursuing their education and career for the sake of marriage. The author is of the view that women should not accept the status of being "housewives" consequently depending on their husbands for survival. From the feminist approach, the author crusades through Fusena that women should also be economically independent in order not to become a liability on men. To her, this is the surest way for women's emancipation in a patriarchal society such as ours.

By this, the author strongly condemns the male-domineering mentality that seeks to place limits on women's career ambitions and education. From a feminist point of view, the author believes that women should be given the same rights and opportunities as men to pursue their career and education to astronomical heights. Again, it is high time the bond of tradition should be broken for women to have the mandate to also secure a second husband.

The Other Three Uneducated Women; What Change do They Represent?

Generally, the Ghanaian women are not known to hold a center stage during the process of giving out or accepting a girl in marriage, it has been a male affair. But the women in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* are different. They are deeply involved. Every discussion about Ali and Esi's marriage has been relayed to us through Nana and Ena, Esi's grandmother and mother respectively. In an interaction with Esi, Nana wanted to know who among Ali's relatives Esi will run to should there be a problem one day since Ali is not a native in Ghana. In an answer to Nana, Esi says;

Whoever he brings then, to meet you and my fathers it will be that person i shall run to, if I am with Ali and something happened to him (Changes: 127).

The same observation could be made about Ali and Fusena's marriage. Mma Danjuma, Ali's Aunt, had to travel all the way from Bamako, Mali, in order to negotiate the marriage rites on behalf of Ali's father and grandfather, Musa Musa and Ali Kondey respectively. Aidoo describes Mma Danjuma's journey to Ghana in the following words

At dawn on the third day Mma Danjuma took the once-a-day bus south to Ghana. Her immediate destination was the old homestead on the border between BuNrkina Faso, Ghana and Togo. It had been agreed that it would be unforgivable not to let their relatives (in Ghana) know of such an important event; and in any case it would make matters so much easier for Mma to go and commandeer some of the relatives and take them along with her, because they would not only know about Fusena's people, but probably spoke something of their language as well (*Changes:68*).

In as much as Ghanaian women, generally, are not involved- or have not been involved-in the process of given or receiving dowry or pride price, or the general process leading to asking for a girl's hand in marriage, Aidoo's female characters are either deeply involved or have led the process, and this article sees it as a new feminine identity Aidoo is calling.

Through the characterization of Mina Danjuma, we can deduce that Ama Ata Aidoo sounds feminist. According to the author, despite Ali's father's strong financial background, he fails as a man to take care of his own child. It is rather Mina Danjuma who takes the challenge to bring up Ali to a good social standing after the death of his mother. What Ama Ata Aidoo wants to suggest here conforms to the cliché "what men can do, women can also do it and execute it better". In our traditional society, fathers are supposed to feed, clothe, shelter, educate and give maximum attention to their children. However, Ali's father (Musa Musa) fails to fulfil these fatherly responsibilities which are beautifully executed by a woman, Mina Danjuma.

NANA

Nana is Esi's grandmother, a traditional woman who finds it very difficult to consent to her granddaughter's decision to divorce Oko whom he is seen as a respectable and loving husband. The grandmother believes there is no justification for Esi to divorce her husband once the husband does not beat her. From the feminist point of view, Esi believes that beating alone is not the only defence for a wife to divorce her husband.

Through Esi as a character, divorce can result if a wife's independence is curtailed and not given the needed attention by the husband. Thus, once men want freedom and demand attention in marriage so do women.

The author through indirect characterization presents Nana to readers as a foresighted character. This is evidenced in the novel when Nana becomes worried for Ali's failure to bring any member of his family for the "knocking" rites. Following this, Nana questions Esi whom she will run to in case something bad happens to Ali. This attitude of Nana indicates that the display of wisdom is not a male preserve. Women too can exhibit a high level of intelligence as evidenced in the characterization of Nana.

Finally, Nana's democratic attitude is revealed when she expresses her opinion that Esi should be given the freedom

to make her choice on the account that Esi is educated and knows her left from right. Thus, the author uses this submission by Nana to campaign that women should be given a complete freedom to make their own decisions devoid of interferences. However, Nana believes that an educated mind is key in making good decisions. Ama Ata Aidoo therefore uses Nana as a character to push forward the feminist idea that women can only be liberated from the dominance of men through education and thus should be given the same opportunity as men to be educated.

9. CONCLUSION

All of the major female characters in the novel are well-educated. Their education is not only the mark of their place in society but also an ironic and elusive symbol that signifies both change and stasis at the same time. The two primary lovers in the novel, Esi and Ali, are also the most highly educated. Esi holds a master's degree, and Ali has studied in France and England. Upon hearing of Ali's second marriage, the first question that his wife, Fusena, asks him is whether or not the woman has a university degree. This question highlights the degree to which education symbolizes progress, modernity, and independence for the women of the novel.

For Esi, her education enables her to have a well-paying job that can secure her independence. It is precisely that independence that attracts Ali to her, and it is the same independence that earns Esi the scorn of her first husband's family. Esi's education sets her apart from traditional African culture, making her feel alienated from her mother and grandmother, neither of whom can understand her attitudes towards marriage and work. Ali is as educated as Esi, and like her, he struggles to balance the two worlds in which he lives. When Ali proposes to his elders that he take a second wife, they are shocked. For them, Ali's education has propelled him into a new world that does not allow for such actions.

Each of the characters in the novel is at least partially defined by his or her career. Esi's job with the Department of Urban Statistics highlights her rational personality, while Ali's job at a travel agency reminds the reader of his tendency to move from one woman to the next. Contrary to Esi and Ali are Oko and Opokuya. Both characters work in professions that demand personal sacrifice—Oko as a teacher and Opokuya as a nurse. The fact that each character works in a field that reflects his or her personality demonstrates the substantial role that careers play in defining identity for the new generation.

Esi plays the role of an educated Ghanaian woman who does things the way she deems fit. She works and earns salary and therefore will not accept whatever her husband pushes on her

To this end, the article has argued that *Changes* is a feminist Novel, and that its writer has advocated for women's rights and freedom. She advocates for a new feminine identity. She calls for, and hopes to see, the African woman who is not only well employed, but has the

independence of mind. And even the uneducated women in Africa, the article has argued, should not be dwarfed in things that she naturally has a role. It is in doing this that the true female identity would be realized

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