

EDUCATION AND THE ASSERTIVE WOMAN: A CASE STUDY OF AMA ATA AIDOO'S CHANGES

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ABSTRACT: *The research looked at the relevance of the African educated woman in contemporary African society: A case of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes. The purpose of the study was to use Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes to showcase the position of the African educated woman living in Africa. A qualitative approach was employed to look at views related to the indigenous African woman and her means of asserting herself through education and also adopted the traditional library research approach through the use of books, articles, journals and publications in as much as they contribute to the worth of the study. It was informed by the Feminist, Womanist and the Stiwanist theories. The main findings of the study indicate that there have been positive changes in the roles of women over the years. This change has come about as a result of women's quest to assert themselves through education and contribute towards freeing their families from cultural and societal dogmas in which women were treated to subjugation and marginalization. A remarkable observation was the intentionality of ascribing to female characters more respectable roles in novels by various writers as the years go by. A conclusion drawn from the study is that education is still a major weapon of enhancing assertiveness in women but it is not the ultimate.*

KEYWORDS: *Education, Educated Assertive Woman, Feminism, Womanism and Stiwanism*

INTRODUCTION

According to a publication by Dierks Bentley (1996)¹, in September 1995, 181 nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a sweeping declaration and platform for action to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the world. Otherwise known as an Agenda for Women's Empowerment, the declaration recognized that "although the status of women had advanced in some important respects in the past the progress had been uneven, in that, inequalities between women and men still persisted and major obstacles remained with serious consequences for the well-being of all people. At the end of the conference, Gertrude Mongela, Conference Secretary-general, declared:

"My dear sisters and brothers, we have made it! We have managed to transcend historical and cultural complexities; we have managed to transcend socio economic disparities and diversities; we have kept aflame our common vision and goal of

equality, development and peace. In a number of areas, we have significantly expanded the horizons of previous Conferences.”

In her closing statement, she emphasized that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. Conferences and advocates from women’s movements of this sort, brought about significant changes that have happened in the life of the female character all over the world. The rise of these movements began in Europe and America when women became aware of their oppression, subjugation and marginalization and started looking for solution by raising feminist movements and used various forms of writings in addition to the activities of the women’s movements and these have helped to bring about this change. Rose Mezu’s *A History of Africana Women’s Literature* (1993)²,

Satisfies the reconstructive phase of female writing, a more positive stage which she calls womanist creativity because women as writers will use tropes and resources of literature to create strong capable female characters not suffering as passive victims on social inequities but women who made their communities take note of their creative force.

African women writers have reached a level of using their creative works to reconstruct a new face that seem to reduce those stereotypes of women that existed in novels years back. Through their creative abilities, there are now examples of strong capable female characters. These examples are painted in resources of literature to showcase qualities that can serve as better models for society. Since literature deals with life itself, what pertains in literature, pertains in society too. It is therefore not out of place when there is a gradual bridging of social inequities between men and women in our society as Mezu asserts.

The situation above is evident in the growth in consciousness of the African female writer creating heroines in their dramas and in their novels which now portray women’s self-definition as expansion in development. Some writers of the previous generation of African female writers of the continent have altered their presentation of the African woman not only as a symbol of social change but rather radical heroines. Examples of such previous presentation of the African woman could be found in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966),³ Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, (1977),⁴ Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (1979)⁵ and Ama Atta Aidoo’s *Anowa* (1980)⁶. This change in perception of the African woman is visible in recent works of the African female writer. This example could also be found in Kauna, a radical heroin, who is created in Neshani Andreas’s *Purple Violet of Oshantu* (2003)⁷, Ifeoma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003)⁸. And Nyansha, in Tsi Dangarembga’s *The book of Not*, (2006)⁹.

The dilemma of the westernized African woman, which has often created a divided self, is a major pre-occupation in more recent novels. A presentation of this kind could be found in the radical feminist character created in Mireille from Ba’s *Scarlet Song* (1981)¹⁰ Esi from Aidoo’s *Changes* (1991) and Maiguru from Tsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous condition* (1987)¹¹.

These characters mentioned above are used in the novels to showcase that the African educated woman is still faced with the problem of subjugation though she is educated. This supports Virginia Woolf's assertion about women who have "the opportunity to learn in a formal, communal setting. She lets her audience know the importance of their education at the same time warns them of the precariousness of their position in society." This emphasizes that having a kind of formal education as a woman, especially with the African woman carries along with a kind of problem that needs to be handled tactfully.

However, the existing conflict about the issue of the educated woman in the African society is now being solved through exploring the effects that education has on improving and empowering the lives of women. Many of these African women writers have succeeded in shifting the emphasis from tragic heroism to women who have made active marks in asserting themselves.

According to the study, the assertive woman is that woman whose mind is exposed to all levels of oppression and refuses to be submerged into all those forms of oppression. Such a mind fueled by exposure from formal education strategizes to oppose all forms of oppression. A calculated effort at freeing one's self from domination is what culminates in total assertiveness. This is emphasized in considering that formal education is a major catalyst in the area of mind training since it serves as a pointer to all levels of oppression. This category of literary creative works that query the status quo, uses education as a means of exposure as well a mind that refuses subjugation includes Ama Atta Aidoo's *Changes* (1991)¹² and Amma Darko's *Faceless* (2003)¹³.

In Sako R's work entitled *League for Democratic Women (LEAD)* 2003¹⁴ he references Nelson Mandela's views that "education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world." This could be explained to mean that in any society, education can be used as a primary effecter of enculturation. In other words, the educational process of a particular location, both formal and otherwise could be a major arm of social control. The fact that education is so important and cannot be overstated has inspired a lot of governments and non-governmental organizations to aid the spread of education in all aspects to promote global change. In recent years they have also embarked on new stances that are geared towards the betterment of education and this issue has been consistently considered as a measure of development around the world.

Consequently, the theme for the 58th Commission on the Status of Women in the year (2015-2016) concerns progress in education: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education and at all levels of education no later than 2015" ... It calls for equalizing access to education for both genders as well as insuring the provision of quality education for all students." This is by way of asserting where intensive action and progress should be concentrated in terms of education. As such, African women writers have chosen to use their works to advocate the advancement of education and its role in improving the status of women. As stated by Alice Walker¹⁵ in her work, *The Colour Purple* "Aidoo has reaffirmed my faith in the power of the written word to reach, to teach, to empower and encourage." It is in view of this background that the study seeks to use Aidoo's *Changes*⁵ to assess the extent to which education can make a woman assertive.

THEORY

The theoretical framework that guides the study's analysis begins with feminism, the mother of women's rights and sits on Stiwanism as the main theoretical focus. This is used concurrently with characterization and style to bring about the truism of the study.

Feminism rejects the injustices in a patriarchal society and is concerned with issues of gender difference and campaigns for the rights of women. It seeks to address issues that deal with women's rights which have been trampled upon and specifically focuses on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression that the female gender is subjected to in the society. It is the oppression of women by patriarchy that culminated into the formulation of feminist ideas and thus considered deconstructing the established predominant rule of patriarchy, and constructed a female perspective which buttress female experience.

In line with these ideas to free women from all areas of subjugation, Molara Ogundipe-Lesley (2007, p. 550)¹⁶ considers the fact that for Feminism to be relevant to the African woman, she needs to consider Feminisms and not Feminism since the geographical location of the African woman does not permit certain ideologies such as lesbianism from feminism that suits women from Euro-America or elsewhere.

She contends that in order not to be imitative, African women must move away from the idea of being westernised since there are so many differing ways leading to the same goal. Ogundipe-Lesley explains that "STIWA" is an acronym for *Social Transformation Including Women in Africa*. The new ideology describes the role of African women without necessarily making them imitate or define African women's agenda on their continent in relation to other feminisms, such as white Euro-American feminisms. "STIWA" gives Ogundipe-Lesley the opportunity to discuss the needs of African women in relation to their indigenous cultures for their social being. Stiwanism concerns primarily the contemporary social and political transformation of African women in Africa. She explains that "what African women want is a social transformation and not necessarily rivaling with men or reversal of gender roles." African women desire a peaceful society where both sexes have a social responsibility in transforming the livelihood of the entire African society. It seems that some African women scholars perceive the word 'feminism' too powerful and threatening and that the word lacks the genuineness of an indigenous African tradition. This situation therefore accounts for the devising of new templates transcending in recent writings by African women writers. It could be considered that this new direction in recent writings could advocate and formulate ideologies that synthesize an African theory which locates their own experiences. In other words, African female writers seem to have a desire to define themselves without being limited of what they are thinking of being a black African woman.

The study therefore chooses the term as an Afro centric approach that many African female authors have used, including Aidoo's *Changes* that deals with the subject under discussion as an indigenous African woman's standpoint in the contemporary African society.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to use Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* to showcase how the indigenous African educated woman cope with the issue of being assertive in the patriarchal system found in *Changes*.

Specifically, the study is to:

1. Look at how Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* presents the assertive woman through education.
2. Use the text to showcase the challenges faced by the African educated woman living in Africa.
3. Consider how the African educated woman is able to manage her situation of being assertive irrespective of the challenges associated with being educated and assertive in the patriarchal systems found in the African society.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the traditional library research approach, by using books, publications, articles and other materials, relevant to the topic. Aidoo's *Changes* (1991) was the primary text analysed. The choice of Aidoo's *Changes* was influenced by how this female creative writer presents education as the pathway to female emancipation and craftily showcases how feminism can be relevant to the African educated woman living in Africa. Since this writer has experienced life as an African educated woman, her novel paints an interesting reflection on her personal life and a representation of the African educated woman living in Africa. Salient information was gleaned from other texts to consolidate the study.

The Plot

Aidoo's *Changes* is a novel that was published in 1991. It is a love story that chronicles the period of the life of a career-centered African woman as she divorces her first husband and marries another man. Arguably, the most important theme in this novel is the way African women are treated and viewed in the kind of African society created in the novel. There is another important theme that also considers women's rights and the lack thereof explored in the various chapters in the book. In the first chapter, Esi, the protagonist who is considered a career woman and works for the Department of Urban Statistics, expresses her anger as she sees to a business travel arrangement and drives over to the offices of Linga Hide Away Travel in order to make this arrangement. Her anger results from the fact that she always ends up doing secretarial job when their office secretary is away. This occurs because she is a woman. It is also assumed that she is doing the work that is supposed to be done by a woman and this is normal in the kind of patriarchal society created in the novel.

Opokuya, Esi's best friend starts a conversation with Kubi, her husband on whom, between them is supposed to use their car. Considering her plight as a nurse, a wife and a mother, Opokuya has always argued out her case to be the one to use the car. Although Kubi has less need and his needs are not also frequently pressing than that of Opokuya, he is the one who almost wins their arguments and gets to use their car. The result of Opokuya's loss almost all the time is also as a result of her being a woman.

Fusena developed friendship with her husband when they were young. It was this friendship that developed finally into marriage. Ali moved to London for studies in order to continue his education

there. Fusena also gave up her career as a professional teacher in order to become a mother and wife upon Ali's insistence. This decision of Fusena means an exploitation of her rights. How the three educated women mentioned above are able to use their education to deal with their plight as women in the text differ according to their individual abilities. The way they are showcased to exhibit assertiveness through education is what the study tries to consider.

According to the text, three educated women are mentioned; Esi, Fusena and Opokuya. Esi is pictured as intimidating and assertive to some extent since she fails to balance the requirements of her job, love, motherhood, marriage and the demands imposed on her as a woman. It is this failure to balance her life as an educated career woman that makes her lose her grip on womanhood. As stated by the Stiwanist, the African woman must identify herself with her geographical location and move away from the idea of being imitative. In other words, it is her rigid westernized kind of lifestyle, that does not allow her to coexist happily in her geographical location as an African woman that paints a character of disapproval out of her.

The story continues to showcase the balanced educated woman in the cast of Fusena but fails to present a happy woman in Fusena at the end. It is clearly shown in the text that in order to fulfil the expectations of a woman, Fusena abandons her career as a professional teacher and resorts to trading as a new career upon the insistence of her husband Ali. Since the text does not present her as self-realized and rather paints of her a picture of self-pity and a little bit of mockery, her assertiveness is thus not really beneficial in the end.

However, Opokuya, another educated woman in the text is presented with endorsement. From the narrative, she is presented as an educated woman who uses her knowledge to assert herself in so many different ways in the text. The style adopted to present these characters and how they used their education to assert themselves is what the study focuses on.

The plight of the westernized African educated woman living in Africa

Aidoo's *Changes* gives the evidence that education has a positive influence on women's economic empowerment. It showcases Esi Sekyi, the protagonist, "as a strong, independent woman with a master's degree." This degree offers her a job that aids her to position herself better in the contemporary African society. Her character is used to detest the stereotype of the African woman described in the novel. From the beginning of the text, she takes care of a travel arrangement which is supposed to be done by her office secretary. The whole scene about this travel arrangement is laced with the atmosphere of anger and this same scene is used both literally and connotatively.

On the literal level, she is in her car on her way to see to that travel arrangement that is supposed to be done by her company. There seems to be a commotion, accompanied by the usual obscenities about women. Esi does not react at all to those comments passed about women on the way. She ignores and concentrates only on why she is made to concern herself with their travel arrangements any time their secretary was away. However, we can glean that Esi is not happy with the subsidiary position that she is handling:

Esi was feeling angry with herself. She had no business driving all the way to the offices of Linga Whatever. The car of course stalled more than once on the way,

and of course, all the other drivers were unsympathetic. They blew their horns, and some taxi drivers shouted the usual obscenities about women drivers. In spite of how strongly she felt about it all, why couldn't she ever prevent her colleagues from assuming that any time the office secretary was away, she could do the job? And better still, why couldn't she prevent herself from falling into that trap? p3.

From the extract, the narrator tries to describe internal conflict in Esi. Esi is forced to take the role of a secretary any time their secretary is not around. There is emphasis on the stereotype of the African woman that patriarchy endorses for womanhood here. This is captured through a female secretary as against a male boss implied from the context. Esi is placed under this internal conflict of man versus nature. Esi disagrees with why the African woman is always made to take a subsidiary role whenever there is the issue about the differences in the sexes. The fact is that she finds it very difficult to accept that stereotype of the African woman that is supposed to be normal in society. She sees the situation as a deliberate process of pushing her back into a problem she had been able to come out from through the help of her education.

The subject of *changes* that dwells on the various turn of situations to suit the modern way of life is emphasized in this extract. It could be understood that there is a voice that is advocating that the time has come for the entrenched idea of patriarchy to be relaxed so that people will begin to stop associating some kind of duties with men and some other kinds of duties with women.

There is also the issue of womanhood and certain specific roles of womanhood that cannot be overlooked. This situation is captured in the question, "why couldn't Esi prevent herself from falling into that trap? The answer to this question could be found in the fact that it is not possible to be a woman and ignore the expectations of a woman.

From the question that is used to make emphasis on the expectations of women in general, the use of the word trap is emphasized by the narrator, both literally and suggestively.

On the literal sense, trap, indicates a piece of equipment that is used for catching animals or it could mean a clever trick used to make someone say or do something that they did not intend to do.

On the suggestive note, education moves Esi away from being linked to an animal since she was able to perceive the fact that she was taking a subsidiary role. Animals could be said to have thinking capacity that is limited to their ability but they do not have the kind of thinking capacity that human beings are endowed with to perceive into situations the way Esi did. Though she is a woman like their office secretary, it is not her role to see to their travel arrangements.

It is interesting to note that Esi's male counterparts at her work place did not explicitly ask Esi to perform that duty for them. Their clever way of asking her to do that job was just to ignore the travel arrangements though they needed to travel.

The conflict lies in the fact that there are changes in those situations that allow women to hold positions that are lower than that of men at work places. It is education that has given Esi the power to raise herself to the same level as her male counterparts yet, patriarchy tries to push Esi back to a problem she has been able to solve with her education. This is what Esi disagrees with.

However, the internal conflict that the narrator tries to showcase through Esi is something that she is not capable of managing. She is angry with the situation yet she goes on to service this same situation. Is it that her employment is more important to her than her freedom? It is this same inner conflict that causes her to leave her only daughter with her mother-in-law though she did not wish to do so. Esi's flaw lies in her inability to manage her internal conflict.

Though Esi's flaw does not help her to approach womanhood that well, it is through her that the narrative voice showcases the change in male, female power dynamics. The narrative voice here emphasizes that the approach towards reversing male, female power dynamics is through education.

Education as a means of empowering women economically brings about the positive effect of helping women to be independent and assertive. Esi's strong will and independent nature is unique and this is as a result of her education. It is significant to note that Esi's priority is in advancing in her profession. Oko's state of anxiety can be used to explain part of this independence:

Look at Esi. Two solid years of courtship, six years of marriage. And what had he got out of it? Little. Nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth. Nothing except one little daughter! ... Thinking of how much he had invested in the marriage with Esi, and how much he had fought to keep it going, made him feel a little angry and a little embarrassed. With all that going on in his head, his penis, which had by then become really big and hard, almost collapsed...He knew she was very much respected by her colleagues and other people who knew the work she did. So she should not really be trying so hard to impress: leaving the house virtually at dawn; returning home at dusk; often bringing work home? Then there were all those conferences. Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half. Is Esi too an African woman? She not only is, but there are plenty of them around these days...these days...these days." p12

From the quotation above, there are many sentence fragments. Examples are:

- "Two solid years of courtship, six years of marriage."
- "Little."
- "Nothing."
- "No affection."
- "Not even plain warmth."
- "Nothing except one little daughter!"

The examples above are said to be fragments because they possess the feature of a sentence that starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop but do not have those other features such as possessing a subject and a predicate that give the sentence a complete thought.

The effect of using sentence fragments in place of proper sentences is to emphasize a confused mind that is not able to think straight. One would realize from the extract that Oko was so much worried but could not do anything about it since Esi did not depend on him. This situation supports the feminist philosophy that considers the idea of an active urge to alter women's position in a given society in order to improve upon the quality of their lives. As Mobolanle Ebonoluwa (2009 p 228)¹⁷ posits, "Women's

oppression is not tied to their sexuality A.C. Rhode (2003p33)¹⁸ puts this assertion in other words that “Female subjectivity lies not in femininity as a privileged nearness but rather in the mind that allows subjectivity.” Esi’s position as an oppressed wife, which is supposed to be the norm in the normal patriarchal society, is not possible because of how she is empowered through education.

The narrator uses punctuation marks excessively in the quotation above and this could be considered unusual for a short piece like this. There are about thirty-two of them but it is used significantly to illustrate that Oko is in deep thought and really analyzing his situation.

There is also a significant occurrence in this same quotation expressing that if a thought can so reduce a man to the extent that his penis can collapse due to a kind of situation that he cannot do anything about, then, Esi has reduced Oko to a woman and rendered him effeminate. It is worthy of note that Esi’s character of giving little time to her family makes Oko feel very uncomfortable with his situation as a husband. As he needed to showcase his male power and to seek care and attention from his wife, he uses force to have sex with Esi because he realizes that Esi had no time to fulfill her marital duties unless she is forced to do so. Thus he:

...Flung the bed cloth away from him, sat up, pulled her down, and moved on her. Esi started to protest. But he went on doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, and forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, trashing to the left, to the right, pounding and just pounding away. Then it was all over. Breathing like a marathon runner at the end of a particular grueling race, he got off her, and fell heavily back on his side of the bed.

The narrative voice here likens Oko to “a marathon runner at the end of a particular race.” The main goal of a marathon runner when he is about to start a race is his ability to win the race and when it starts, no matter the pain or whatever happens during the race, all his determination is, is to cross the line that awaits him. He is also aware of the challenges ahead of him. That is, there are other competitors who are also racing with him with this same goal. All energies are exerted in the race to ensure success. In such a race, whether he wins or loses he lies down to rest off his pain and later on reflects on the sadness associated with the loss or the happiness associated with the win. Comparing this situation to Oko’s sexual encounter with Esi, one realizes that Oko did not consider the end results. According to the narrative voice, he had a plan of giving their marriage a second chance. Instead of using a better resolution strategy that could help their relationship, he rather thought of showcasing his power as a man and thus exerted so much energy to force Esi for sex without thinking about the consequence. His main aim was to hatch his plans and after the incident he falls heavily back on his side of the bed and then begins to reflect on the consequence of his act just like the marathon runner at the end of a particular race. The effect of the simile used here is to emphasize the reversal in male, female power dynamics that the narrative voice tries to showcase. The fact is that though Oko succeeds as a man at that point in time, he ceases to be a man as well because his quest of being a man ends up in a divorce he does not wish for and this sends him packing with his daughter. Esi’s reaction is calm to what is described as marital rape and she obtains a divorce due to how she feels after the whole incident:

Once in her office, she sat down, first to get her breath back. Then she just sat, uncharacteristically doing nothing at all. She became aware that she was in no

hurry to do any work inside her office, or go out and meet anybody. In fact, she was rather surprised at the degree of lethargy she was feeling. She could not remember when last she felt so clearly unwilling to face the world... and then with a kind of shock, she realized that in spite of the second bath she had had before leaving home, she was still not feeling fresh or clean. Clean? It all came to her then. That what she had gone through with Oko had been marital rape”

The narrator explains how angry and disorganized Esi is after the incident. One could argue that a husband has the right to a wife at any given time but the situation with Esi is different. She cannot just accept that stereotypic position prescribed for womanhood. It becomes very shocking that Esi, who often brought work from the office to continue working on it in the house because she couldn't finish with it at the office, now feels lethargic. However, the use of ellipsis here suggests that the idea of women serving to satisfy the sexual needs of men at any given point in time is being questioned. The ellipsis is captured in the sentence “She could not remember when last she felt so clearly unwilling to face the world...” and it emphasizes the fact that there is an unfinished thought somewhere about the stereotype of the African women, as serving to satisfy the sexual needs of men at any given point in time. This very analogy shows how assertive Esi is, and supports the radical feminist's philosophy that any form of dependence on men will equal subjugation of women. Therefore, patriarchy will only end when women are liberated from the physical and emotional violence inflicted by men in the society. The radical feminist adds that women are being suppressed by a male – dominated society both in education and in later life. This is explained to mean that the curriculum is more based around traditionally male dominated and sets up men more prosperous work opportunities. Coupled with this is the stereotypical view of women's part in the society of becoming housewives, marrying early, and having children and this contributes to the suppression put on women by the male run society. For Esi to be raised to the level of the dominated in society, as in possessing certain opportunities above Oko through her education, emphasizes that the approach towards the reversal in male, female power dynamics is through education. She uses marital rape, a very strange word at that period of time to explain and represent what has happened to her and stands upon that basis to file for divorce. With the divorce obtained their daughter is raised by Oko's mother. This situation supports the fact of the reversal in male, female power dynamics in which the woman is the one who is sent packing. This time around it is Oko who is supposed to leave the house. He leaves with their daughter instead of Esi, leaving, which is usually not the “norm.”

Esi later falls in love and becomes the second wife of Ali Kondey, a married man described as a young charming and romantic business executive:

Esi and Ali reserved their love-making for the comfort of Esi's bed... They would immediately fall into each other's arms and hold her welcoming kiss from the front door through the length of the sitting room, through her bedroom and on to her bed...p74

Essentially, Esi's sense of independence is so astonishing and very intimidating; The same Esi, who feels humiliated after Oko forcibly has sex with her, and takes the cloth away leaving her naked, now enjoys walking around naked after love-making with Ali Kondey. She also feels no shame in spending time with her close friend Opokuya as they discuss issues pertaining to marriage and womanhood in the lobby of Hotel Twentieth Century.

The name of the hotel is used symbolically to suggest to readers that there is a new era that has come along with the consciousness of the African woman in the area of marriage, divorce, motherhood, wifehood and careers that are essential to womanhood. This is used in relation to the stereotype of the African woman that existed years back.

It is interesting to note that the use of the lobby of the hotel Twentieth Century, explains a connection between the year of publication of Aidoo's novel *Changes* (1991) and the era and what probably circulated about the issue of womanhood during that particular period.

Evident to this fact could be found in parallel subjects in novel written by African female writers that also circulated around the same period of time. Examples are, Zaynab Alkali's *The still born*, (1984)¹⁹ Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981)²⁰, Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, (1983)²¹ and Bessie Head's *The Cardinals* (1993)²².

Esi and her friend freely drink alcoholic beverages as they discuss such critical matters affecting this new era in the lobby of Hotel Twentieth Century.

Ali Kondey on the other hand is caught within a mesh of his polygamous marriage. He hardly can sustain the routine of his home (with children and first wife, Fusena) - his office and Esi's house. This weakness makes him appears to Esi a mere representation of a husband figure. She hates the fact that Ali's love is only presented through numerous gifts that he showers on her over their romantic and erotic period. Esi decides to put an end to the whole thing. She was just fed up and her reaction begs the question, what is in a marriage?

This is no marriage... But if this is it, then I'm not having any of it', she added with such chilling finality that for a little while, Ali really did not know what to say. Then he turned, went back to the chair and picked up...his briefcase and turned to leave. 'If that's how you see it, then I'm going', p158-9

The marriage ends at this point, not officially as had been initially arranged for the two partners, but this time in Esi's mind, she has ended the marriage with Ali and assumes her lonely life. It is this situation Kubi, Opokua's husband tries to take advantage of but Esi resists, signifying and testifying to the fact that she is still in control of her emotions and sense of self. She may be active sexually and very titillating, but she would not be seduced by her close friend's husband. Esi is thus presented as, a modern educated woman who knows her mind. Being at the centre of the story, with a space and a room of her own, from which to speak and be heard on personal issues, Esi is able to make decisions based on her own perception of what constitutes justice and injustice.

However, it could be observed from the narrative that Esi is not presented as one who is totally self-realized, considering how she is crushed as events unfold to the end:

All Esi was aware of was desolation. As for her mind, it was completely blank. She did not know what to do and was not sure whether she had to do anything. What made everything bad was that she had been aware that her grandmother and Opokuya had tried very hard to warn her. She had just been a real fool. What was she to do? Where does she go from here? Too tired to do anything else, she continued streaming down her face. After a while, she thought she should get up,

go and wash her face and begin to pull herself together. But even that seemed like such a massive operation; as though someone had tasked her to rebuild the world. She continued to sit. p181

The tone here is that of pity and could be captured from Esi's sudden crush. The narrator presents marriage as fulfilling and a natural part of human life and should therefore be handled with tactfulness and discretion. This point supports one of the tenets of Stiwanism that emphasizes marriage as a better and a social life on the African soil. Esi does not handle her marriage properly. She places her career above all other things in her life and these include her marriage. Because the narrative makes it clear that marriage is a part of human life, her decision about marriage does not help her character. From how she leaves her first husband, readers are made to assume that she does not need any kind of marriage life. However, the fact that she enters into another marriage explains why women cannot ignore that part of their lives. Her decision to marry Ali was a mistake in the first place. If she so needed a husband she should have worked on the first one in order to find fulfillment.

The choice of words used around her character at this point emphasizes the narrator's displeasure about how she dealt with marriage. The diction chosen is fairly simple as the narrator uses such words as: "desolation", "blank", "bad", "warn", "fool", and "tired."

The words send a message to readers that the narrative voice does not approve of Esi's rigid westernized lifestyle. The fact is that in the African world view, the woman's position cannot be discussed in vacuum. "It is not a matter of rejecting the process of fighting for women's self-definition and self-assertion," (as posited by Ogunidipe - Lesley) but it is due to factors that mediate the location of African women in gender discourse. Some of these factors include: ethnic, tradition and predominantly, religious influences. As Irene D'Almeida, a Francophone African writer has it, "there are many roads leading to the same goal" and as a similar Igbo philosophy also adds to the thought, "there is no absolute way to anything." Therefore, Esi should have been a little patient. Self-assertion does not mean being so self-centered to the extent of breaking up two marriages all in the name of not being fulfilled. Once with Oko, Esi "Definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife." She "complained" endlessly anytime she had to enter the kitchen. She leaves Oko in the name of not having time for herself. When Ali, also gives her a lot of time for herself, she still has a problem and complains endlessly for care, which, Oko gave so much to her but she threw away. Whilst Esi ends up as officially divorced in her first marriage and unofficially divorced in a second marriage, because she could not manage her marriage well, Fusena had to manage a polygamous husband.

Education, Economic Independence and Female Assertiveness

In *Changes*, Fusena is presented as a graduate from a post-secondary teacher training college and has become a teacher at a primary school. It is her education that nearly earned her a marriage and an employment that could have empowered her economically: "Then the big man *alhaji* had come, everyone had said that he wanted to marry Fusena because he needed a young and smart wife who would run his new business and keep his accounts for him." (p 71).

The narrative voice in *Changes* uses this complex sentence to emphasize the fact that men are interested in intelligent and smart women. The complex sentence used here paints a picture of contradiction. The contradictory aspect of it is "that the few men who claim they like intelligent and active women are also

interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens.” This statement is sourced from page fifty-four of Aidoo’s *Changes* and it is used in the conversation between Esi and Opokuya.

According to Aidoo 1991, “Very few men realize that the sharp girls’ men meet and fall in love with are sharp because among other things, they have got challenging jobs in stimulating places” The fact is that what some of these men fail to acknowledge is that such jobs that are found in stimulating places are also demanding. It is such jobs that keep the mind of the woman active and alive. Aidoo adds that: “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...and then the more reasonable job, is often quite dull too.”

Of course, the idea behind this assertion is to maintain the woman under the stereotypic position kept for womanhood. (That is, satisfying the hunger and sexual drives in men) This entrenched position is very difficult to handle because, it is this image given to the woman that will turn around to accuse her of being unintelligent and not smart enough. Again the active and intelligent woman who is made to change her position in such a manner is usually not satisfied, mostly very bored and unfulfilled. This is exactly what happened to Fusena when she married Ali. Evidently, Ali succeeds in getting Fusena to use her intelligent and active nature to fend for herself and their unborn baby while he was away. This could be captured in the extract: “Then there was Fusena’s own salary. Maybe, even with him out of the country, Fusena would not find it too difficult to look after herself and a child?” (p 70).

It is her education that gave her the strength and the ability to look after herself and her baby for three years before Ali came for her and her baby to London. This was possible because education aids economic independence. Meanwhile later when they returned from London, Ali succeeds again in changing Fusena’s career as a teacher into a trader. Though her career changed, her education enabled her to succeed in the business that her husband opened for her. It is clearly stated in the text that there was nothing that her kiosk did not sell. This explains how education can empower a woman such that even her kiosk could compete with supermarkets at the area where she and her husband lived. Though we consider that this line is exaggerated, it highlights the fact that Fusena knew the material needs of her community and made sure that her kiosk supplied these needs. Interestingly, Fusena’s education did not liberate her totally. It bestowed on her, economic empowerment, yet she was not fulfilled. The fact that Ali married another woman with a master’s degree and later added his secretary reveals that so far as Ali is concerned, education and an enterprising wife is not a panacea to adultery. Though Fusena is said to be happy with her success in business, which could be attributed to her education, she considered her plight very hard to carry on. The narrative voice presents a rather hopeless situation:

“Soon after finishing his degree examinations, and even before Fusena arrived, Ali had got a full- time job. And now he began to study part-time for a master’s in Economics and Business Administration. Fusena on the other hand sat at home in their one-bedroom apartment or did her housework and looked through catalogues. When she went out, it was to shop or to window shop. Then she became pregnant with the second baby. So from then it was being pregnant, nursing the new baby, looking after Adam and Ali, and staring at London’s bleak and wet views. That was hard: the rain. Fusena kept asking herself how a daughter of the dry savannas of Africa could have ended up in such a rain-soaked hole.

“Rain soaked hole” as used in the extract is metaphorical. It has a literal and suggestive interpretation

On the literal level it stands for a death trap. This is because, eutrophication prevents oxygen from the atmosphere to enter the water and so it will not be possible for all living things to survive in this kind of water. This kind of water also stinks because of the nutrients built in the water. It also serves as a breeding ground for animals that are harmful to human health such as mosquitoes.

On the suggestive note, It means how difficult Fusena’s situation is to her. The phrase captures succinctly, an inactive lifestyle and paints a picture of boredom and regret which explains the limitation imposed on her by her husband and her environment at that point in time. It also communicates drowning, and destruction of potential. This is explained to mean that if Fusena is found in this kind of hole, she will be stagnant with ideas just as the stagnant water that is not allowed freedom to flow. She will lack innovation and this will not enable her to explore in life. Such a person will have to depend on someone for expansion. Besides this difficult situation is the mockery that is attached to her delivery of a baby or being pregnant throughout her stay in London and there was nothing she could do about her situation than to accept the demands that womanhood has placed her. Though Fusena is presented to be assertive to some extent, the pitiable portrayal of her character robs readers of the ability to consider her, an outstanding example of a woman worth emulating. She is showcased as a woman who manages her polygamous husband and her new career but is not elevated because she feels so down when her husband chose a more educated woman above her and she could not do anything about it.

The Stiwanist Perspective of the Assertive Woman

Opokuya, however, manages her marriage even when things are not too perfect. She could speak her mind on any issue that bothered her and did not allow any of her problems to affect her life throughout the narrative. The narrator on this note presents Opokuya rather as the character who is cast in the mold of an assertive woman.

Opokuya, is assertive because, she has a voice that calls attention to injustice and refuses to allow herself to be subdued due to her ‘fat’ looks. Through her education, she is employed as a state registered nurse and a qualified mid-wife. “She had been a state registered nurse and a qualified mid-wife, for nearly fifteen years” (p18). The narrator describes Opokuya as “definitely fat”:

Compared to Esi, Opokuya is definitely fat. Not that she cared. She moved like lightning, and laughed through the days of the year. Any time the question of her obesity cropped up, she made it quite clear that the fact that she was fat had nothing to do with not knowing anything to do about it.

Esi and Opokuya are compared here as two African women. The significance is to show that even though Esi is raised so high she is crushed due to her rigid westernized lifestyle whilst Opokuya remains outstanding with her liberal way of viewing African womanhood. In essence the portrayal of Opokuya fits the Stiwanist’s perspective of the study.

This statement is explained to mean that according to the stiwanists, there are so many perspectives and differing social needs that need to be articulated and addressed. She feels that the African woman must focus on her area of concern, socially and geographically. Her ideology is that the African woman must move away from defining feminism in relation to Euro-America or elsewhere and from declaiming loyalties and disloyalties. As a matter of fact, there is the need for critical transformation of a positive nature where positive means maximizing the quality of life of the African woman and her potential.

Literally, lightening occurs when two clouds that are supposed to move in the opposite direction clash. When the clash occurs, there is light and sound at the same time. Because light travels faster than sound, the lightening comes before the thunder and it carries along with a high voltage that is also very important because it breaks down nitrogen into nitrate that allows a fertile soil for plant growth. Lightening also represents attraction since electricity is synonymous to electrocution.

The suggestive meaning could also be that though Opokuya is fat which is seemingly synonymous to laziness, she rather moves fast. If someone moves fast, it means the person knows exactly where he or she is heading towards. Thus, if Opokuya moves fast, then she is considered to be assertive because assertiveness is to show precision. Opokuya's condition and her manner of movement will also attract attention to herself and her attitude of not caring about her condition also shows assertiveness.

Unlike Esi and Fusena who allow their condition to affect them, Opokuya is said to laugh throughout the days of the year. She used her condition to affect others in a positive manner just as lightening that carries along with high voltage that is also very important because it breaks down nitrogen which is not useful into nitrate that is useful because it allows a fertile soil for plant growth. She could do this because she is a nurse and educated.

From the excerpt, the suggestive meaning obtained from the use of the simile, tries to expand the reader's sensory perception. Aidoo 1991 asserts that; "there are changes in the situation where fat women are those that the African man prefers and so educated women who debunk the idea of the husband factor like Esi are supposed to know best and consider the question of her obesity." However, Opokuya makes it quite clear that "the fact that she was fat had nothing to do with not knowing what to do about it." the narrator makes a point that education helps a woman to become assertive and this aids her in her decision making and enables her to avoid succumbing to societal pressures. Instead of feeling bad about her situation, she rather decides to make herself happy as she "laughs through the days of the year." This explains why she is presented as one who is very confident and always stays on top of issues because, critically speaking she could manage her situation (being fat which could have given her problems) very well without falling sick. This, she could do with the help of a mind trained to be assertive. This ability of using her mind helps her to consider another important issue to her advantage – her ability to manage her health and even child bearing:

Opokuya had thought quite hard about the politics of population and fat. She had concluded that the way population especially was being handled in relation to Africans left her frightened. It seemed to her that anytime someone else showed such a keen interest in your not making children, then for sure, he is not just interested in your good health, your prosperity and the good health and prosperity of your children. For herself, Opokuya had decided she wanted four children. She

had had them and then brought the matter out to discuss with her husband Kubi... Opokuya had not so far been able to solve the weight issue that neatly, even in relation to herself. She would admit once in a while that she was a little bothered about the possibility of a heart complication. She routinely took her blood pressure, which remained remarkably normal. Besides, since she didn't know the extent to which her body was capable of expanding, she had long time ago thought to herself to do without the more obvious criminal items like sugar and fatty foods. So it was that knowledge and this discipline which gave her the confidence to argue hotly.
p16

Because Opokuya's mind is schooled, she has the ability to perceive things and decide which one is acceptable to herself. For her to think about "the politics of population and fat" and tries to consider a choice that is suitable to her situation, explains that she does not listen to what society dictates but what she feels is right. It is her education that quickens her ability to do this and this shows assertiveness because she is presented here to take decisions based on her own self perceived knowledge.

Opokuya does not restrict her mind to the conscience of society. The fact is that the narrative voice uses the word "thought" to express how analytic, thinking and questioning her mind is. There is also a successive repetition of words to reinforce the idea of giving proper attention to the politics of population and fat. It could be understood that people are not giving the needed attention to the issue which has resulted in ignoring a very pertinent problem about life. The narrative emphasizes this fact with the use of ellipsis that expresses an unfinished thought. The effect of using the ellipsis is to create the awareness of this serious matter that seems to be ignored.

In contrast to how Esi is presented, Opokuya is presented with a tone of endorsement. The diction chosen here is simple and the narrator uses such words like, "politics", "keen", "sure", "good health", "prosperity", "normal", "capable", "discipline", "confidence" and "hotly." In using such words, the narrator accepts and embraces the character of Opokuya as the right woman whose character is worth emulating and thus continues to present Opokuya as someone who is able to manage her home and her marriage at the same time though it is hard to live in the kind of patriarchal society found in Aidoo's *Changes*.

One area of relief for both of them was the result of a decision they had made quite early in their life together. They would not make a habit of dropping their kids at school and bringing them home in the evening. They would do that only when the children were in nursery and kindergarten... (p24).

Opokuya's ability to live peacefully with her husband and four children, explains why the narrative voice endorses her character. It is significant to note that even when a serious problem about the use of their car arises Opokuya chooses to buy her own car in order to bring about harmony in her home. This quality of hers supports the Stiwanist's ideology that the "African woman is indissolubly linked with men and therefore must work out ways of co-existing peacefully and harmoniously with men." It is positive when a woman's earnings enable her to take such an important decision to bring peace in

her home. This is possible because of Opokuya's economic independence. This economic independence could also be obtained from her education.

Her education also opened her mind to understand the relationship between the pre and post-independence social practices that helped her harmonious cohabitation described in the novel.

Opokuya and kubi lived on Sweet Breezes Hill. It had been the most prestigious of the colonial residential areas. They occupied the same old colonial surveyor's bungalow built in the 1930s, and Opokuya was always quite aware of the different spirits who inhabited the house. There was that of the first surveyor who had probably selected the hill as the side most suitable for occupation by them, the English civil servants who were sent to these deadly mosquito – infested regions to administer the territories on behalf of their royal majesty, and generally civilize the natives...They had lived close to one another so that they would be well placed to fight those natives with guns, the mosquitoes with alcohol, and general boredom with women.

From the excerpt, the place where Opokuya and her family reside is faced with a pre and post-independence social practices. This is so because; their home was previously occupied by the colonial surveyors in the 1930's. The narrative voice presents the issue of the two spirits metaphorically. The point is that since the colonial surveyors were supposed to civilize the people, the original social practice of the indigenous people would be interrupted or even destroyed totally based on how the civilization was embraced. For Opokuya to live in this same apartment that previously belonged to colonial surveyors signifies that she is considered a symbol of connection between the pre and post-independence social practices. This assertion is true because of how her character as a liberal African educated woman is endorsed as compared to how Esi's sophisticated westernized lifestyle is disapproved.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the study focused mainly on the position of Aidoo's *Changes* in relation to the three educated women used in the discussion. It could be realized that the effective combination of literary techniques and language bring about a clear and interesting rendition of the story. Through this process Aidoo's readers are able to understand the activities of the characters better and also learn valuable lessons from the text. A closer look at the roles played by these three women; Esi, Fusena, and Opokuya reveal that education really empowers women to become economically, politically, socially and physically assertive and well recognized. However, being assertive goes beyond just having a kind of formal education since a lot of educated women are still battling subjugation.

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