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**Women at the Crossroad of Change in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A
Love Story* (1991)**

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I dedicate this modest dissertation to

- ✓ My beloved parents **Mourad SELLAMI** and **Naima**.
- ✓ My dear brothers **Yacine, Salim** and **Mohammed Amine**.
- ✓ All my friends (**Kang Seong Gu, Lina, Katia, Chafiaa** and **Romaissa**).

Kamelia

- ✓ My dear parents **SAIB Belkacem** and **Saliha**
- ✓ My sisters **Lilia** and **Celine**
- ✓ My brother **Akli**
- ✓ My friends **Aziza, Said, Liza, Massiva, Chafia, Lamia, and Ouardia**
- ✓ In loving memory of my defunct friend and heart brother **Said Mouheb**
(Always loved, never forgotten, forever missed)

Sarah

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Abstract

This dissertation has dealt with Ama Ata Aidoo's novel Changes: A Love Story (1991). The purpose is to discuss women's positions and roles in contemporary Ghanaian society and the many complex issues that impact their lives. The main focus of this work is on the author's denunciation of issues such as gender, sexuality, patriarchy and polygamy. To explore this theme and to approach texts, we have used Alice Walker's theory of "Womanism" in her book In Search of Our Mothers Garden's: Womanist Prose (1983). In the first chapter, we have dealt with the representation of women as agents of change. Aidoo has given a new image of African women who are educated, intelligent, audacious and powerful. In second chapter, we have dealt with women who caught between African traditions and modernity. The dilemma of these women is that they can't make not only their individual choices, but also personal and professional lives. Furthermore, in the last chapter, we have dealt with the main protagonist who couldn't achieve her liberation due to the many difficulties and obstacles that she has faced in her society. To conclude, we have reached that women face difficulties to make their own choices. They can't achieve true freedom and happiness in their familial or social roles either intellectually, physically or sexually.

Key words: *Womanism, Marital Rape, Patriarchy, Sexuality, Polygamy, Gender, African Woman, Generational Clash.*

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“We are not white. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves...we and the Africans will be working for a common goal; the uplift of black people everywhere.”

(Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*)

I. General Introduction

This dissertation deals with women at the crossroad of change in Ama Ata Aidoo's novel *Changes: A Love Story* (1991). This latter, deals with women's positions and roles in the post-colonial African society. It exposes the difficulties and the obstacles of these women who caught between African traditions and modernity when they come to make not only their individual choices, but also personal and professional lives.

Colonialism and post-independence landscape of modern Ghana have changed women's roles through the imposition of patriarchy, capitalism, Victorian values and colonial policies. In fact, the role and status of the African woman places her at the nub of cultural conflict because the struggle to gain equality in a male dominated modern society has widened her choices in ways that challenge her potential for success as wife, mother and career woman.

Indeed, the Age of Enlightenment in Europe gave birth to liberalism, man started to think in a rational way for the first time. Liberalism led to feminism in the late nineteenth century (Andersen, 2006). Indeed, many feminists such as the English writer Marry Wollstonecraft, her most notable book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) Virginia Woolf, the pioneering female novelist and feminist, in her non-fiction extended essay, *A Room's of One's Own* (1929) came to call and urge women to fight for their rights. In their quest for their identity and emancipation, a few numbers of privileged women gained certain power while patriarchy persisted and took other forms such as oppression, domination and violence. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton states: "Society as organized today under the man's power, on the high way, in our jails, prisons, asylums, in our homes, alike in the worlds of fashion and of work" (Bryson, 1999:25).

Indeed, western feminism as a movement ignores realities, experiences and issues of black women in Africa and the Diaspora. It focuses more on sexist oppression and neglects issues of race, class and gender. It pays no attention to the existence of non-white women whose experiences are different from that of white one. However, in recent decades African women writers globally have voiced out the realities of black women through their literary works. These last, reveal an awareness of gender issues which negatively impact the lives of women. By sharing vital knowledge and information on these issues, they challenge women to fight against their passivity, silence, subordination and for their rights to be respected. Furthermore, through the platform of literature, African women writers have moved from a conciliatory perspective to more assertive one in their treatment of the subject of womanhood in relation to traditional and cultural values. Among these women, there are Ama Ata Aidoo, an African writer from Ghana who has been known to the world for her works that are written in English. She becomes an important figure after the publication of her first play *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1964) in which her concerns were the Pan-Africanist struggles against racism and imperialism. Moreover, in her major pieces—*Anowa* (1970), *No Sweetness Here* (1970), *Our Sister's Killjoy* (1977), she has depicted the role of African women in contemporary society since she has been an outright supporter for women's liberation in the national and international contexts.

Ama Ata Aidoo's writing reflects the breath of her career and has undoubtedly been influenced by the historical events which have shaped her life. Through the portrayal of her female characters in her works, Aidoo conveys an intimate and gender-focused perspective on the themes of love, marriage, sexuality within marriage, and motherhood. In addition, she always tries to define the struggle of the African women, where the female characters change

from facing patriarchal subjugation to self-assertion, non-literate to educated and well-sensitized.

To conclude, Ama Ata Aidoo concerns as a writer is to show more interest in thematizing the positive, believing, as such, that what obtains in the work of the male writers is negative presentation of the female. So, it can be said that most of her works are revolving around the idea of challenging and questioning the role of the African women in the modern African society.

a) Review of the Literature

Ama Ata Aidoo is known for dealing with the idea of challenging and questioning the role of the African women. In addition, as a black feminist Aidoo concerns herself with the emancipation of women in most of her works. This last, are like a mirror that show the bitter reality of her modern African society. As a consequence, her work has received significant attention from critics, academic commentators and other writers. A few examples are cited in her novel, *Changes: A Love Story (1991)*.

To begin with, the main central issue to critics in Aidoo's novel is female sexual self-determination. In the journal article *Research in African Literature (2002)*, Maria Olausson states that the most challenging idea in *Changes: A Love Story (1991)* revolves around the idea of female sexual self-determination. What does a woman want? Maybe this isn't the question Esi's mothers are attempting to answer after all. How much can a woman possibly expect in this world ruled by men? ...but when Esi leaves her perfectly good husband and agrees to become a second wife of her lover Ali, they literally scream at her for her stupidity. It is not that they are entirely blind to Esi's vision or that they wouldn't see that her demands are based on a perfectly reasonable sense of entitlement if she was a woman. The problem is that she is a woman and that she chooses to behave as if this didn't matter (65)."

For Jane Bryce and Kari Dako in the journal article *Textual Deviancy and Cultural Syncretism: Romantic Fiction as a Subversive Strain in Black Women's Writing (2000)*, the change reflects "an ironic commentary on the disillusion that followed the degeneration of the physical fabric of Ghanaian society and the disappointment of those early hopes" (3). This irony is further examined in 2004 by Dako et al. According to them, the novel looks at marriage, family and male-female relationships with brutal honesty. It unravels traditional concepts, it strips the

modern concepts naked and leaves the emancipated African woman abandoned and alone, paid off with a new car but short changed in everything else. She has lost both husbands and abandoned her only child for her own gratification. (Dako et al, 2004). Perhaps, Esi's situation reflects the challenges, suffering and confusion of women as a result of the changing ideas of marriage and motherhood. The issue of marriage is thus taken beyond a concern with individual choice or morality to the question of how subjects are shaped and changed in changing societies.

From all what has been said above, it is worth mentioning that the critics are valuable and important to the understanding of Aidoo's work. Yet to our understanding, they remain very limited in perspectives in that they limit Aidoo's work to aspects that they depict in their works.

b) Issue and Working Hypotheses

From our review of some of the literature written on Ama Ata Aidoo's work, one can notice that many studies have already dealt with her novel. So, we decided to continue in this way to contribute for the enrichment on the aspect of changing roles of women in Ghanaian society, women's emancipation, sexual self-determination, besides the societal norms and conventions that oppress women. Moreover, our main concern throughout this dissertation is to reveal Aidoo's concern about women's difficulties to make their own choices and their status in her society by challenging, deconstructing and subverting the traditional voicelessness of the black women trope.

Indeed, this dissertation examines the many complex issues impacting the lives of contemporary urban African women. While many of the issues explored may be familiar themes to most readers, the context in which they unfold goes far beyond the personal. The difficulties encountered are professional, social and sexual in nature. So, how has Ama Ata Aidoo

portrayed the atrocities of women's segregation and oppression? And to what extent she has challenged and questioned women's positions and roles in modern African society?

To achieve our purpose, we relied on Alice Walker's theory of "Womanism". The basic premise and assumption of this piece of research is Ama Ata Aidoo's depiction of women as fighters, not as surrenders, as heroines not as victims. In fact, despite the fact that the author's representation of African women under the siege of patriarchy and masculinity, however, she makes of her women heroines either through education or by challenging the authorities of their husbands and oppressors. We suppose that the author and her work owe much to her own upbringing within repressive areas and eras. We therefore assume that this pushed her to commit herself to the depiction of women within and out of repression as it will be discussed in depth in the discussion section.

c) Methodological Outline

The study is divided into four sections, the introduction is the first section in which we introduce the purpose of our study, as well as the Review of The Literature. The second section is related to Methods and Materials, through which we explain Alice Walker's theory of "Womanism" in her book *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983)*. As the summary of the novel and the results section focuses on the findings we reached in the discussion.

The discussion section has three chapters which deal with the new image of black women in the modern African society and how they challenged traditional roles and resisted the structures of oppression, marginalization and patriarchy to be able to make their individual choices about their personal and professional lives. In the second chapter, we discuss women

caught between African traditions and modernity. In third chapter, we discuss whether the main protagonist has achieved her liberation. Finally, the conclusion reached in our study.

II. Methods and Materials.

A. Method.

1. Alice Walker's Theory of "Womanism"

The term Womanism is coined by the Afro-American writer Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Alice Walker used the term Womanism to distinguish the experience of black women from white woman. This last, struggle for equality and liberation in terms of gender while womanism in terms not only of gender inequality, but also race and class-based oppression. She sees womanism as a movement for the survival of the black race; a theory that is often used as a means for analyzing black women's literature. It is unique and aims at honoring Black women's strength. (Ghani, 2011:1296). As Mary Modupe Kolawole in her book *Womanism and African consciousness* (1997) states: "The desire of the womanist is to liberate African women, change their consciousness and recreate a positive self-perception to enhance progress" (153). Therefore, "the search for self-respect, dignity, self-assertion, and new moral values in new quest for redefinition and self-esteem" (Ibid) is of great importance in the womanist concept. Moreover, it helps to give more visibility to their experiences and other women of color who have always been at the primacy of the feminist movement after being marginalized and invisible. As Showalter points out in the book "*A Criticism of Our Own. Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory.*" (1997), for both Afro-Americans and feminists, the black woman is "the Other Woman, the silenced partner" (Showalter, 1997:214). Womanism works to ensure the well-being of all humanity, male and female. It is not only fighting for

gender equality, but also for justice against racial oppression against black women in Africa and the diaspora.

Alice Walker's "Womanism" depends on four major important points. First, according to her, a Womanist is a "black feminist or feminist of color". In black folk expression when mothers say to their daughters "you acting womanish", they mean that their behavior is willing to take risks, brave, courageous and responsible. (Walker, 1983: xi). Second definition by Walker attaches to a woman who loves other women sexually/ non -sexually. She appreciates and prefers women's culture, emotion, strength and sometimes also loves individual men. Moreover, it is committed to the "survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Ibid.). Third, a woman who loves moon, loves music, loves dance, loves the spirit, loves struggle, loves folk and loves herself. Finally, Walker's famous expression, "womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (Walker, 1983: xii) illustrates how black women are "womanist" whereas white women remain just "feminist". In addition, sketches black women as beautiful and strong beings.

It can be said that the focus of Walker's theory is to give a name to the black women's struggle against patriarchy, white women's racism and sexism of black men. The idea is that the conditions of black women are different from those of the white women. Indeed, Alice Walker and Ama Ata Aidoo as two black womanists prefer Womanism above feminism because they think that is rooted in black culture to indicate clearly that the concept is shaped by the specific experience of being a black woman. They wanted to give a word that evokes the strength, passion, grace of black women's history of creativity and struggle against racism, patriarchy and sexism they confront in society. Both suggest that women can get an upper hand

at some point by challenging the authorities of their husbands, oppressors, and dare to overcome their odds. Womanism is a black feminist theory that is designed to empower black women.

B. Materials

1. Summary of Changes: A Love Story (1991)

Changes: A Love Story is a novel written by Ama Ata Aidoo in 1991. In the novel, she focuses on a three-year period in the lives of Esi Sekyi, Opokuya Dakwa and Fusena Kondey, three women approaching their mid-thirties in Accra, Ghana.

Esi Sekyi is Aidoo's central character in the novel. She is a well-educated, financially independent and liberated woman, who works as data analyst with the Department of Statistics in Accra, Ghana's capital city. She always gives higher value for her own personal fulfillment rather than playing the role of a good wife and a mother. Esi's husband Oko is also a professional teacher interminably complains that Esi avoids her duties as a mother, wife and even not gives him priority to his needs, including his wish for a second child. This led to the dissatisfaction in their marriage. Oko does not give her space nor respect her career. The emotional distance and lack of respect in this relationship pushes Oko to rape her. Esi's feeling of violation and the violence of the rape out-weigh the ostracism that ending her marriage would entail for her. She promptly divorces Oko. After a while, Esi enters a polygamous marriage with a charismatic travel agent Ali Kondey who is attractive, intelligent and well-educated handsome man but he has other interests apart from her since he is truly womanizer.

The second character is Esi's best friend Opokuya who occupies a more feminine role as a nurturing mother, nurse, and midwife. Like Esi, Opokuya has created a career for herself, but manages to also fulfill cultural expectations of a woman as a subservient wife. Every morning, Opokuya and her husband, Kubi, argue over the use of the car: a dispute that nearly

always ends with Opokuya's defeat. Although Opokuya frequently relents to her husband during this common argument, she describes the matter as "one of the few areas of friction in their otherwise good marriage" (Aidoo, 1991:17) suggesting that she experiences contentment in other aspects of her relationship with Kubi.

The last female character is Ali's first wife, Fusena who has known Ali since their young childhood. Following her marriage to Ali and the birth of her first child, she abandons not only her career, but also education. Fusena longs to finish school and get her degree, but is permanently held back by her husband Ali. This last, is a managing director of Linga Hideaway Travel, a very handsome and well-educated man. He insists that he can earn enough money to support the family. She tries to resist Ali's desire for a second marriage, but she is lately persuaded into it by the elder women of Ali's family. She is resentful with the fact that Ali has chosen a woman with a university degree to be his second wife, given that he prevented her from completing her degree. Fusena is somehow a tragic figure who has sacrificed her independence and career for a man who doesn't only take a second wife but also continues to have multiple affairs with other women.

III. Results

While handling Ama Ata Aidoo's 1991 novel *Changes: A Love Story*, we have reached interesting findings. From the novel, we noticed that the author positively portrayed her female characters. Indeed, to resist stereotypes that depict women as worthless and weak creatures who are emotional and unable to make decisions, the author has created strong-minded and rebellious female characters who break customs, question and challenge the values set by the male-dominated society.

The first finding of this dissertation is that Ama Ata Aidoo has given a new image of black women in the modern African society by portraying her female characters as agents of change. These women are Esi, Opokuya and Fusena. These latter, are educated, liberated, powerful and assertive women who try to impose their own choices and made way of life. Moreover, they are feared and considered as a threat to tradition and man's position in society.

The second finding concerns the difficulties and the obstacles faced by the African women who are caught between modernity and traditions. Through the novel, female characters struggle in balancing between traditional and modern life not only of their own, but also the once of the elders. Indeed, patriarchal and traditional values are ones that oppress women in order to excel the success of man. It can be said that Aidoo has used *Changes* to address the substantial weight of the various social burdens that are permanently imposed on the African woman whether they are married, educated, single or domesticated.

The third finding concerns the main protagonist's achievement and liberation. Indeed, even though Esi's master degree allows her to be independent, have a job and courage to take control of her own life. However, it does not prevent her to not face many obstacles that curbs her to achieve her liberation.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: The Representation of Female Characters as Agents of Change

To start our discussion, it is worth to remember that women in general and black women in particular have experienced throughout history many forms of oppression, rejection and discrimination by men. As a result, Ama Ata Aidoo has used her pen to denounce this injustice towards them. She has made her feminist position clear in her writings by giving a new image to the African women. Moreover, she has challenged the status in the cultural, political, and spiritual realms of her community by using her craft to present women who challenge traditional roles and resist the structures of oppression. Among these women, we have Esi, Opokuya, and Fusena who are portrayed as prominent female roles. Given some of her achievements, it is obvious that Aidoo feels strongly about the roles of women in Ghanaian society and their ability to hold powerful positions. Indeed, these females are presented as educated, intelligent, audacious, and powerful women. We will also discuss how their career contributed in changing the world.

1.1 Esi Sekyi as an Assertive and Modern Woman

The main female character, Esi Sekyi, a middle-aged black modern and professional woman who works at the Department of Urban Statistics in a ministry in Accra, Ghana. In addition to having a job that pays more than her husband's, Esi's job comes with the home in which she lives with her husband and daughter. She has always put her career well above any duties than playing the role of an ordinary wife and as a mother, this is clear when she says: "... leaving the house virtually at dawn; returning home at dusk; often bringing work home? Then there were all those conferences." (Aidoo, 1991:8). Indeed, Esi can be seen as the representative of a strong, successful, self-assertive and confident woman. She seems to have a strong sense of self

throughout the novel and she functions as a moral inspirational source for “doing what is right”. Esi Sekyi is undeniably portrayed as an individual with empowering personality traits that relate to Alice Walker’s definition of a Womanist. This last, is defined as courageous, willful behavior, audacious and outrageous. As McWilliams mentions in *Emerging perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo (1999)* that “Esi could be seen as the stereotypical Westernized professional West African woman” (p. 347).

Esi has always lived in a family where women are intended to submit to their husband’s desire and order. Nana, Esi’s grandmother tells Esi not to marry for love, but to marry a man who loves her more than she loves him. Then there is Esi’s mother with whom Esi cannot have the closeness and solidarity that her mother shares with her own mother. On the other hand, Oko, Esi’s husband, often fights with her on the issues of her work and her role as a wife and mother. Although he loves her very much, he cannot tolerate her air of independence in relation to him, especially since she earns more than he does, which draws criticism from Oko and his family, especially, his sisters. These latter, as well as Esi’s mother and grandmother are of the view that an educated woman loses sight of her role as a “woman” in the view of the patriarchal society.

As a career woman, Esi always confronts difficulties with men in her work. *Changes: A Love Story (1991)* starts with Esi scolding herself for taking up a responsibility that is not part of her job. She is angry by the fact anytime their secretary is sick, it is assumed that, since Esi is a woman, so she will be able to stand in for her. In order to not fall in the trap of pre-determined gender roles that construct and position women at the bottom of power structures, Esi should really know how to assert herself with her male colleagues. It can be said that her struggle against these pre-determined structures shows the complexities concerning the changing roles

of women in Ghana. As Pauline Ada Uwakweh in the book *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo* (1999) discusses Aidoo's celebration of the spirit of the modern Ghanaian woman and the dilemmas that these modern changes trigger within sociocultural milieu.

As a matter of fact, Esi and her husband, Oko who is a professional teacher, have had many battles. They often dispute over their assumed gender roles within the relationship, such as Esi's refusal to cook for the family or bear any more children. As a consequence, his relationship has been affected with both his wife and their only child Ogyaanowa. During one argument, Oko rapes his wife in an angry fit. The assault leaves Esi devastated and isolated from her friends and family as "marital rape" or in other words "spousal rape" has not been validated or even widely accepted in any African society. So, one might question why didn't the concept exist? The concept of marital rape is a recent one for, in Esi's words, "Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right" (Aidoo, 1991: 12). The disturbing act exemplifies the trauma of embodied patriarchy not only as fictional events, but also as a reflection of real cultural issues. So, it can be said that rape is the basis that leads to a more ambivalent debate about the concept of power within gender relations.

In fact, the purpose behind using sexual violence in Ama Ata Aidoo's work is that she wants to raise a topic to suggest the idea of those women serving to satisfy the sexual needs of their men at any given time. Moreover, it focuses attention on the fact that there is an unfinished notion somewhere about the stereotype of the African women and at the same time indicates how Esi is assertive. Consequently, the only way to end patriarchy and severe oppression that have led to the creation of ideas and misconceptions about what women should or should not do is by liberation.

Since Esi has a successful career and she is economically independent consequently, she settles on divorce which is not something easy to ask or do specially in the African society. However, Esi prefers to take the risk and save herself rather than to submit to this type of gender oppression and subjugation and why not be “the first African heroine to seek divorce from husband for marital rape, a crime socially perceived as the husband’s claim to his property rights” (Uwakweh, 1999:365).

After Esi’s decision to divorce Oko, she meets her best friend Opokuya and have a serious conversation about her divorce, the alienation of single women, female oppression and education as a form of female empowerment. After hearing Esi’s decision, Opokuya is worried and anxious about her friend because she clearly knows that in African society generally and Ghanaian specifically, women are not positively regarded. She reminds Esi that “unlike so many cities abroad, there isn’t much here that single woman can do to relieve the loneliness and boredom of long hours between the close of the working day and sleep” (Aidoo, 1991:57). It is unheard of for a woman not be married; that is “women who never managed to marry early enough” (Ibid).

The situation becomes more pitiful when women are widows or divorcees because they are stamped as sorceresses. In addition, as Opokuya repeats, “it is easy to see that our societies had no patience with the unmarried woman. People thought her single state was an insult to the glorious manhood of our men. So, they put as much pressure as possible on her” (Aidoo, 1991:57). A woman in such a position marries, remarries, or returns to her former husband. Otherwise, she is ostracized and she is left to die of shame and loneliness. So, it can be said that women have no right yet to do or have all they want. In other words, no state is comfortable for the woman, whether single, married, divorced or even educated.

Despite the fact that Esi is independent and has courage to take control of her desirable life, she receives a lot of criticism from both her family and husband’s family for neglecting

her role as a mother since African society is against the neglect of biological roles. As Catherine Obianuju Acholonu proposes in her book *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995) the woman need not neglect her biological roles but rather should focus on healing and protecting the cohesive essence of family culture like the woman's right over her body or her sexual rights, the right of the child to parental care and protection from violent and abusive situations. Ogyaanowa is the daughter of Esi and Oko Sekyi. She has to deal with her parents' habitual disputes, a situation she should rather be protected from.

Ama Ata Aidoo tries to show the changing roles of women and how they actually struggle in order to combine the emergence of changing roles with the traditional ones. Esi's disability to balance between her motherhood and career is unacceptable to her husband and fellow women. However, somehow her attitudes can be seen as a rebellion against society's prescribed roles that a woman should be responsible for training the child. In this case, Ogyaanowa becomes Oko's responsibility.

Moreover, when Esi informs her mother and grandmother of real reason she desires to divorce Oko, they respond with anger: "What is the problem? Both her grandmother and her mother really screamed this time: the former with her walking stick raised as though to strike her, and the latter bursting into tears... Are you mad? (Aidoo, 1991:38). They think of her as a fool woman for divorcing a husband like Oko just because of marital rape. This last, demonstrates that it is not really considered to be a violation of the wife's body. Even her grandmother answers Esi's question about love

"Love? ... Love...Love is not safe, my lady Silk, love is dangerous. It is deceitfully sweet like the wine from a fresh palm tree at dawn...Ah, my lady the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves." (Aidoo, 1991:42)

Indeed, Esi was hoping to have the support of her family in dealing with the assault but indeed, no one stand by her side and even her husband's people call her a "semi-barren witch and told her that they thought their son and brother was well rid of her thank God" (Aidoo, 1991:70). Despite the fact the struggles she is facing, Esi decides to ignore her emotional pains and weaknesses into power and try to stand up on her feet to be able to carry on her life.

Later, Esi meets Ali Kondey a charming, good looking and wealthy from owning a successful business and falls in love with him. Even though, she is portrayed as a modern woman however, accepting Ali's proposal for marriage is not easy and which at the same time struck her differently because becoming a second wife to a man who is already married to his teacher-training school sweetheart Fusena with three children, is not really what Esi hoped for. Since Ali now has two wives, each will explicably be free of the total attention that would have been a real source of worry in a monogamous home, specially where the wife combines office work with motherhood. This, of course, is good news to Esi. As Buchi Emecheta proposes for women who find themselves in polygamous situations, Esi becomes:

settled in her new life ... her basic hopes for marrying a man like Ali had been fulfilled. Ali was not on her back every one of every twenty-four hours of every day. In fact, he was hardly ever near her at all. In that sense she was extremely free and extremely contented. She could concentrate on her job ... Now she had almost lost the harassed feeling that had attacked her every late afternoon of every working day: that she had to hurry home, or to the market or the shops to buy something, or do something in connection with her role as a mother, a wife and a home-maker. (Emecheta, 2007:166)

According to her, Ali is the ideal type man who is comprehensive and not pushy husband. In addition, the absence of children in their marriage was opportunity for them to spend all time together. However, the complexion of the relationship begins to change especially when he starts to stay away for long periods of time, either he visits his other family or be busy to spend time with his new secretary since he is a truly womanizer. Indeed, after a breakdown and care

analysis of her situation, Esi defines again her needs and her relationship with Ali. In spite the fact that, she is still feeling lonely, she finds out that her relationship with him “has stopped being a marriage” (Aidoo, 1991:197) and the fact that they had “become just good friends who found it convenient once in a while to fall into bed and make love” (Ibid.)

It can be seen that Esi before accepting Ali’s proposal and being a second wife is only because she is searching and looking for a new position for female autonomy by choosing an alternative way of living “trying to create to herself a space in which her sexual desires, her need for companionship, her counter need for freedom and her career ambitious can all coexist” (McWilliams, 1999:354). Esi dissociates herself by stressing the importance of her career to her development demanding her sexual rights by reacting and finally divorcing her husband, remarrying and ultimately living the life of a single woman. Indeed, she has understood that she does not need the presence of male in her life in order to be able to fulfill and actualize her potential. Despite the fact all major problems that she is facing, she chooses do not divorce her second husband but remains his second wife. Esi, without any doubt symbolizes the other level of emancipation where a woman does not just get educated but reaches the level where she decides who comes into and who goes out of her life. This can be clearly seen in Esi’s divorce of Oko and marriage to Ali to get enough space for her career.

1.2 Opokuya Dakwa as a Modern and Traditional Woman.

In Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story (1991)*, self-affirmation can be seen not only through Esi’s character but also Opokuya Dakwa who is fighting back male stubbornness, subjugation and oppression to get her freedom and rights. “The act or skill of defining oneself, one’s actions, and one’s rights”.

Esi’s best friend Opokuya is the representative of the modern and traditional woman. At first analysis, Opokuya seems to be the woman who has it all: a loving husband, beautiful children,

and stable job as a nurse and midwife. Like Esi, Opokuya has created a career for herself, but manages to also fulfill cultural expectations of a woman as a subordinate wife. Moreover, she is consumed by an obsession with her physical appearance and weight, which can be seen as a form of oppression: “Opokuya had thought quite hard about the politics of population and fat... Opokuya had not so far been able to sort out the weight issue that neatly, even in relation to herself” (Aidoo, 1991:14). It can be said when women are taught to be more concerned with their physical bodies than the one of their minds, they engage in self-control, become self-regulating, and prevent themselves from making progress in a male-dominated society. Therefore, existing gendered power structures are preserved. In this way, Opokuya’s self-consciousness about her weight is an embodied patriarchal ideology used to prevent her from truly actualizing her identity as a woman.

In addition, she is a compromiser who is willing to play “the fool” in her marriage. In other words, since she represents a traditional woman too so according to her, one of the partners (in a marriage) should sacrifice himself or herself for the other partner. Indeed, in order to truly understand the feelings of Opokuya, Ama Ata Aidoo wrote “How could she Opokuya Dakwa, sleep any time she felt like it? With a fully-growing man, a young growing woman, and three growing boisterous boys to feed?” (Aidoo, 1991:34).

Despite the fact that Opokuya makes a lot of efforts, she receives very little support from her husband Kubi. In fact, every morning Opokuya and Kubi argue over the use of the car especially when it comes to share their only car. This last, becomes a strong source of conflict between them “Each morning’s argument ended with one of them giving in, the winner drove the car” (Aidoo, 1991:19). As a mother of four children who enjoys her career as a full-time registered nurse and midwife has yet to persuade her husband to buy her a car or give her primacy when it comes to the use of it. Indeed, the car is not just a luxury for Opokuya but rather it is a mean

that would help her to be more self-reliant. Her husband's rejection somehow suggests that if women are truly independent, they must be able to buy their own cars instead of waiting or relying on their husbands to do it. It can be seen that through Opokuya, Ama Ata Aidoo main concern is the importance of co-responsibility and sharing between married couple in the running of the home and children, or a compromise that will make the burden light for the woman. Anything less of this is the perpetration of wronged womanhood and social injustice against the woman. Even though Kubi does not need the car in urgent, however he always makes sure that he has it at his disposal and his excuse is that "in most regional offices there was always a place in the car-park marked out for the surveyor's. As such, he was convinced that the car should be parked there all day" (Aidoo, 1991:17).

The situation between them is already not good and to make it worse, Kubi shows what little respect he has for his wife when he makes a pass at Esi. In fact, Ama Ata Aidoo has wanted to criticize men through his actions for not taking responsibility and care for their home and children. Moreover, Opokuya's feelings has been truly hurt when she complains to her female colleagues about her husband's "unreasonable attitude" from not giving her car, they considered her as spoilt "it was Opokuya who was unreasonable or mad...She should listen to the stories of women who paid for cars which their husbands then took over completely. In some cases, whisking their girlfriends around in them" (ibid).

From their perspective, it's the car that comes with her husband's job so she has no such right to ask for it. Unfortunately, the behavior and attitudes of this kind of women make the feminist quest complicate, harsh and even unfruitful. Indeed, the thing that has led Opokuya to be detach from other women is through taking both her career and family duties in a serious way, despite the fact that she is struggling.

Unlike others, Opokuya is capable to debate and argue her points of view and thoughts with her husband Kubi without fear which is something not all women can do. The fact that her friends think she is mad certify to the fact that she is completely different especially when it comes to thinking as well as her strong will to succeed.

It can be seen that Opokuya endeavors to be the woman that “has it all”, either at home as a mother and wife or at work as a nurse. She may seem the happiest but it is only due to her state of mind “ignorance is bliss”. She has even suspected her husband’s loyalty but she has always preferred to not speak and let it out of mind. However, “ignorance is bliss” can turn turtle on its owner and be heartbreaking instead, which is in fact really happened towards the end when Kubi tries to assault sexually Esi, Opokuya’s best friend.

Through Opokuya’s life, once may understand that modern woman in African society may have it all, but not to the roots of their lives. In order to distract herself from any problems and troubles, she chooses to be the voice of reason in other’s lives.

Indeed, friendship is one of the main reasons that reinforce the belief on women’s ability to help and construct each other. This can be clearly seen through the conversation between Opokuya and Esi when she asked her about the possibility of marrying a man who is already married. She protests “Look here, Esi, can you see yourself and Ali’s wife getting together...? Being friends? ...you know, for instance getting together about Ali’s strengths and occasionally trading gossip about his weaknesses? Can you see that happening?” (Aidoo, 1991:97).

1.3 Fusena Kondey as Traditional and Self-Conscious Woman.

African women are more likely to experience oppression and struggle for equality. Indeed, this can be seen clearly through the third female character Fusena Kondey. This last is a trained teacher, wife of Ali and a mother of three children. In addition, she is a traditional

woman who is limited both corporally and intellectually in the role assigned to her by her husband and the patriarchal society.

Fusena's character is not as developed as other key female characters, however her contribution to the novel is undeniably valuable. It can be said that she is "self-conscious woman". She is actually aware of her situation but she lacks the strength and the ability to change the course of event of both her life and society. However, some black women change from self-determined strong to submissive oppressed woman who silently endures oppression. Indeed, these women are often portrayed as scapegoats of not only social intolerance, but also violence, suppression, and mostly religious intolerance.

Fusena is known for being subjugated woman which can be seen through the abandonment of her career and education goals to share a home with Ali and become a full-time wife and mother. Despite her ambitions, Ali insists that he is earning enough money to take care, support his little family and mostly practices his authority over his wife by refusing her pursuit of these desires. Fusena settles for a provision kiosk which her husband opens for her as compensation and as something to keep her busy. Fusena who could simply have used her knowing to benefit society, now turns into a petty trader. Indeed, this is not the preferable and this is not what one would expect a woman to do and feel satisfied with; particularly when she has the opportunity to become a better person. Fusena is clearly aware of the situation and by the fact that rules have ruined her life.

Fusena struggles with her husband's decision to take Esi as a second wife demonstrates that Aidoo stereotypes woman as an oppressed and subjugated partner in a relationship. Women are expected to submit and obey their husbands without even asking questions. when Fusena

has heard about Ali's decision to marry a second wife, the women in Ali's own family lament that

The older women felt bad. So, an understanding that had never existed between them was now born. It was a man's world. You only survived if you knew how to live in it as a woman. What shocked the older women though, was obviously how little had changed for their daughters-school and all!" (Aidoo, 1991:107).

Indeed, the real issue is surrounding not only in terms of polygamy she might hold, but rather because the second wife holds prestige as a statistician with a master's degree. She reveals the degree to which her life's goal has been frustrated and deserted for the sake of her marriage and children. Regardless of her ambition and strong will, Fusena submits to the role of a dependent housewife.

The rain was not the only problem Fusena had with her life as Ali's wife in London. One rainy day, it occurred to her that life should offer more than marriage. That is, if the life she was leading was in fact marriage. To begin with, she was beginning to admit to herself that by marrying Ali, she has exchanged a friend for a husband. She felt the loss implied in this admission keenly, and her grief was great. The first time that she this hit her, she actually sat down and wept. She also knew immediately that there was nothing she could do about her situation...Fusena had stared hard at London and admitted that she had another problem. It was this business of Ali getting more and more educated while she stayed the same. Sometimes she truly felt desperate. For whereas she could console herself that she would leave the wetness of London behind her once they went back home, she knew the other problems would stay with her. (Aidoo, 1991:66)

In *Changes: A Love Story (1991)*, it can be seen that Fusena does not make any efforts to pursue her career nor to speak with her husband about his promiscuous behavior. The only time she wants to change and make effort to fight in order to win the battle is when she finds out that Ali wants to have a second wife. However, Fusena fails because she has been silent, submissive and accept everything and anything her husband wants for so long. Indeed, the polygamous situation in which Fusena finds herself in is completely different from the traditional one where all wives live in same compound with their husband and take turns with

cooking and nuptial responsibilities. Moreover, the pressure caused by the patriarchal conventions, she finds herself forced into a polygamous marriage she was not interested in. She settles, once again, on a decision that favors Ali. In fact, to an extent, Fusena has no excuse for ending up in this way because it is her life and due to her education, she could have easily taken full control decides what she really wants and go for it, but she has allowed Ali to take a decision on her behalf concerning teaching.

Chapter Two: Women between Modernity and Traditions

In this discussion, we have shed light on two main points. The first point is about the generational clash that has emerged in the contemporary African society. Women are caught between modernity and traditions. It is hard for them to make their individual choices in such traditional society. They have to follow the rules that govern the society they live in. The second point is about the educated characters who struggle in balancing between their own modern life and traditional one of their elders, besides the struggle between modern and traditional customs which are extremely difficult for the protagonists since they are searching for more modern sense of freedom and independence. However, they do not own the ability to determine their own decisions.

1.1 Generational Clash

Esi Sekyi, is the central female protagonist whose life as a modern woman reflects frustration because of the conflicting demands of family and career. She considers her family as an obstacle to the pursuit of her career. Maria Olausen in the journal article “About Lovers in Accra”: Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story* notes that *Changes* is thus: “not primarily concerned with depicting suffering of the good wife within a dysfunctional marriage but analyzing the possibilities of female subjectivity in modern urban society” (Olausen, 2002:68)

The rightfulness of traditional parameters of marriage and motherhood is called into question through Esi’s dissatisfaction and revulsion over sexual domination by her husband. It can be seen from the first pages of the novel that the right to self-identity and control one’s own body are brought into conflict. Within patriarchal Ghanaian society, controversy exists over the right to the female body. The male biased power structures determine that women exist to fulfill

the subservient roles of wife and mother. So, it can be said that sex has been transformed from something to enjoy to something that shows power and masculinity, the eagerness of control and oppression of the female partner. Indeed, tensions reach climax when,

Oko 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, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, pulling in and out of her, thrashing 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 particularly grueling race, he got off heavily back on his side of bed. Esi asks “what does one do with this much rage”? (Aidoo, 1991:9)

As her illuminating analysis is driven home, Esi has met the dark side of patriarchy and has realized that what just happened was a ‘marital rape’. Traditionally, there is no such word in Africa, the woman is not allowed to decide about her own sexuality. Moreover, this word does not exist in any of African indigenous language and there is no word to describe this crime. In fact, the boundaries that constrain Esi and all African women are expressed through her humorous reflection on the absence of a word for ‘marital rape’. She comically imagines an academic forum where the question is posed

‘Yes, we told you, didn’t we? What is burying us now are all these imported feminists’ ideas ...’
‘And dear lady colleague, how would you describe marital rape in Akan?’
‘Igbo? Yoruba?’
‘Wolof? or Temne?’
‘Kikuyu? or Ki –Swahili?’
‘Chi-Shona?’
Zulu? ...or Xhosa?’
Or... (Aidoo, 1991:11)

Esi realizes that there is no word or translation to the concept of marital rape in African culture and certainly in many other societies. Esi’s rebellious and strong character pushed her to break social determinism. Therefore, Oko’s assault on her body drives her to leave him and ask for divorce. Elia Nada in the journal article “*To be an African Working Women*”: *Levels of Feminist consciousness* in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes* states that

“An articulation of the concept of marital rape is critical to the conscious development of African feminism, as it allows for a woman ‘s realization of her rightful ownership of her body under any and all circumstances” (Elia4).

Esi’s husband, Oko, is irritated and frustrated by her devotion to her career and her failure to fulfill her traditional role as a wife and a mother. He has obliged Esi to have a sexual intercourse taking advantage of his physical strength, this shows the men’s domination of women in patriarchal societies and the sexual violence that women face. Ama Ata Aidoo presents this sexual aggression as it is accepted in the Ghanaian society, and sees that men use physical and psychological violence in order to make of their female partners easy preys who can submit to their husbands. Although marital rape does occur, the patriarchal culture does not recognize the act as violent, but rather as a husband’s right. Oko’s act of rape is performed out of the desire to reestablish himself as the dominant male figure in his marriage. He perceives Esi’s educational and professional success as a threat to his masculinity, and in response, turns to sexual violence to reassert himself as a male and psychological in nature and means through which Oko intend to reclaim ownership of his wife and masculinity. In this way, the body becomes as much a tool of social oppression as patriarchal ideology. As Susan Brownmiller’s classic feminist text on sexual assault, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* explains that “A sexual assault is an invasion of bodily integrity and a violation of freedom and self-determination wherever it happens to take place, in or out of the marriage bed” (381).

The African woman is traditionally and conventionally expected to play the role of wife and mother. A woman is expected to be available to her husband and children at all time. However, due to Western education, women role in the society continues to change. Ama Ata Aidoo portrays two main categories of women in her novel. The old generation is presented by Esi’s mother and her grandmother Nana. These latter, were against her divorce because for traditional African women ‘Marital rape’ does not exist since a husband is the owner of his

wife's body. According to them, Oko is the perfect and respectable husband. For the old mother's "Marital Rape" does not exist and the husband has all rights on his wife that is why they could not understand Esi's position, this reaction demonstrates how old generation's point of view has a considerable impact on women's life in the society and makes the protagonist's one difficult. Protagonist women find themselves chained to the traditions that are imposed by the society, a society that prohibit any change especially women's sense of self-worth and empowerment. The old women have never accepted Esi's way of living and thinking, especially when she tells her grandmother about her plans to enter into a polygamous marriage with Ali Kondey. Esi was looking for love something that was missing in her first marriage with Oko.

'Leave one man, marry another. Esi, you can. You have got your job. The government gives you a house. You have already got your daughter. You don't even have to prove you are a woman to any man, old or new. You can pick and choose. But remember, my lady, the best husband you can ever have is who demands all of you and all of your time. Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol? In our time, the best citizen was the man who swallowed more than one woman, and the more, the better. So, our warrior and our kings married more women than the other men in their communities; To prove that they were, by that single move, the best in the land. (Aidoo, 1991:109)

Esi's grandmother's position towards her second union shows that she does not condemn polygamy but the fact that Esi is searching for love. The grandmother's reaction shows that the old generation does not believe in love and proves that in Ghanaian marriages love is not necessary. According to Nana's refusal, Aidoo argues that a traditional Akan matrilineal woman views this relationship as a doom because of the presence of the element of love.

The Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta exposes in her works the great influence of grandmothers and mothers on their daughters what she calls 'Generational Continuity'. Mothers that are handing down the future to their daughters, as conservative and traditional women they teach them how to be wives and mothers as they have learned from their elders too. It can be

said women have to adapt to their oppressive situation in order to survive. The choice is no longer between polygamy and monogamy, western or traditional, but between oppressive, exploitative and alienating arrangements that serve to socially control any relationship. In the novel, both male and female characters struggle to maintain a balance between their traditional African's roles and duties as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers and the changing ideas of marriage and motherhood.

The education does not define someone's way of thinking or living which is the case of the two female characters Opokuya Dakwa, and Fusena Kondey, whose way of living is contradictory to their education because of the society. On one hand, Opokuya Esi's best friend has an unbelieving reaction towards Esi's decision to divorce and questions her about possible remarriage since single women are not positively regarded in the Ghanaian and African community. Opokuya's position towards Esi's divorce shows that even an educated working woman, can have traditional thinking. On other hand, Fusena kondey Ali's first wife, is the perfect example of the submissive woman who sacrificed her career in order to play the role of the ideal housewife. Through the juxtaposition of both feminine characters, it shows that Aidoo's objective is to highlight a conflict of generation and we can say that the three female characters are different from each other, Esi is the most liberated one, Fusena is the most submitted one but Opokuya is in between, liberated to a certain degree and traditional at the same time she is the only one who succeeded in balancing between her career and her family, on another side, the old generation which is represented by Esi's Grandmother and mother we can say that they are of those who are against any change and disagree with the desire of Esi to live differently and not be conform to the standards of the perfect Ghanaian woman.

1.2 Education

Changes, gives the evidence that education has an influence on women's Economic empowerment. Ama Ata Aidoo creates an educated woman in the person of Esi who find difficulties in her life as a woman, wife and mother in a society that prevents her empowerment. As an African woman, the cultural expectation and prescription is that she should be ready at any given time and in whatever circumstances to fulfill her husband's sexual desires and pleasures. However, as a Western educated woman, Esi thinks differently. She believes that a woman has the right to exercise a measure of authority over her body, and make decisions without fear or violence. After having accused her husband of 'marital rape', she decides to divorce her husband.

Esi travels to her mother's village to confer with her grandmother Nana. This last, can be seen as a pragmatic traditional woman who has not been corrupted by white man's education, responds by asking Esi some rhetorical questions: "But Esi tell me, doesn't a woman's time belong to a man? ... Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol? ... Esi, why do you think they took so much trouble with a girl on her wedding day?" (Aidoo, 1991:110). Seeing a different mental disposition, once may notice that there must be something responsible for this difference, Esi cannot, but reason that

"Why had they sent her to school? What had they hoped to gain from it? What had they hoped she would gain from it? Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort? What had that person or those people hoped to gain from it? For surely, taking a ten-year-old child from her mother, and away from her first language — which is surely one of life's most powerful working tools — for what would turn out to be forever, then transferring her into a boarding school for two years, to a higher boarding school for seven years, then to an even higher boarding school for three or four years, from where she was only equipped to go and roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother's world... all this was too high a price to pay to achieve the dangerous confusion she was now in and the country now was in." (Aidoo, 1991:114)

Through the passage above, it can be said that there is so much that is condensed. First of all, Esi acknowledges that her mental disorientation is the result of her Western education. Second, she is struggling for not being able to privilege between African and the western culture. The third is that white man's education alienates a child from his/her parents. As Esi admits, "she could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother" (Ibid). She realizes that once a child has been taken from her mother and from her first language, she/he cannot re-enter into his/her parents' world. So, her alienation from her culture is responsible for her conceiving of a Western concept, 'marital rape.' She herself observes that her mother and grandmother can never envisage such a notion since they are not products of Western education.

Another female character Opokuya, Esi's best friend who is cast in the mold of an assertive woman. Even when things are not too perfect, Opokuya manages her marriage. She could easily speak her mind on any issue that bothered her and did not permit any of her problems to affect her life. It can be said that she is an assertive woman because, she has a voice that calls attention to inequity and refuses to allow herself to be suppressed due to her 'fat' looks. The narrator makes a point that education helps a woman to become assertive and this helps her in making decision and allows her to avoid surrendering to social pressures. Instead of feeling bad about her situation, she rather decides to make herself happy because Opokuya's mind is schooled. She has the ability to perceive things and decide which one is suitable to herself. According to her, instead of thinking about 'the policies of population and fat', she explains that she does not listen to what society dictates but rather what she feels is right. Indeed, it is her education that accelerates her ability to do this and this shows assertiveness because she is presented to take decisions based on her self-perceived knowledge.

Opokuya's ability to live peacefully with her husband Kubi and her four children, shows why the narrative voice endorses her character. It is considerable to note that even when a serious problem about the use of their car, Opokuya chooses to buy her own car in order to bring harmony in her home. It is positive when a woman's earnings permit her to take such an important decision to bring peace in her home. This is possible because of her economic independence. This last, is obtained due to her education.

The last female character is Fusena who 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." (Aidoo, 1991:59). In fact, this sentence is used to assert the fact that men are interested only in educated and brave women. However, in this case, the complex sentence is used to paint a picture of contradiction. The contradictory aspect of it is that the men who claim they like intelligent women are usually interested more in having such women permanently in their beds and kitchens... 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. Obviously, Ali succeeds in getting Fusena to use her intelligent and active nature to take care of herself and their unborn baby while he was away. This could be seen 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?" (Aidoo, 1991:64).

It is due to her education that gave her the adequacy and power to look after herself and her baby for three years before Ali came for her to London. Later, when they back from London, Ali succeeds again in changing Fusena's career as a teacher into a trader. Indeed, even though her career changed, her education permitted her to succeed in the business that her husband opened for her. It can be said that education can empower a woman such that even her kiosk could compete with other supermarkets. However, she knew exactly the material needs of her community and made sure that her kiosk supplied these needs. Interestingly, even the fact that Fusena is an educated woman the society that she lives in did not allow her to be totally liberated, but it granted on her, economic empowerment, yet she was not fulfilled.

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* focuses mainly on the position and the experience of the three educated women. These latter, do not hesitate to express their views concerning marital, educational and professional settings where women are being oppressed. Moreover, a closer look at the roles played by these women; Esi, Opokuya and Fusena reveal that education really empowers women to become economically, politically, physically and socially assertive and well recognized. From one hand, it can be said that the assertive educated and strong-willed woman frightens the society. Indeed, it goes beyond just having a kind of formal education since a lot of educated African women are still battling subjugation. On the other hand, this should not be taken to mean that Aidoo condemns her protagonists for their education; but rather it is to reveal the painful truth of the African society. In this vein, Patrick Oloko in the electronic journal of African Media Studies states that "Changes demonstrates that as access to quality education improves for Africans regardless of sex ... African women have returned from the work place to see their homes from a newer perspective ... This ... entails coming to terms with the reality of a new life for the woman, a life which significantly challenges the traditional responsibilities of women in unanticipated ways" (Oloko, 2008:112).

Chapter Three: Is Esi's liberation achieved?

In *Changes*, the narrative begins with the protagonist Esi Sekyi to attain fulfillment beyond her domestic role as a mother and wife with a college degree and a prominent career working at the Department of Urban Statistics. By the virtue of her job, she travels to many parts of the world many times: "Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half." (Aidoo, 1991:8) for conferences, seminars and workshops. As Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) says: "Womanish" is the opposition of "girlish" which means "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious." (Walker, 1984: xi) Which is not the case for Esi who is responsible, grown up and in charge of the fate of black women. In addition, Ama Ata Aidoo represents, the so-called emancipated women of the city like Esi who before going out to her office, take sufficient time in making up as she states:

She unwrapped the cloth from her body, moved to the dressing table, took what she would need and brought the things to her side of the bed: some cream for her skin, a deodorant stick, a very mild toilet spray. She sat down, and picking these one by one, she started getting her body ready for the day. (Aidoo, 1991:6)

The above quote describes Esi's behavior in terms of dressing up. She is influenced by the western culture. This shows the change brought by modernity and its impact on the African educated class.

Indeed, Esi is that woman whose achievements evoke the communal voice echoing through the intrusive narrator: "Is Esi too African woman" (Ibid). Unlike her friend Opokuya Dakwa who is conservative, educated with the credential of a fifteen years career as a registered nurse and midwife. Esi appears extremely distant, headstrong and unruly. Despite of all these, Oko's extravagant love for his wife overwhelms him such as the aroma of her powder, perfume and body makes him erotic.

“I love this body. But it is her sassy navel that kills me, thought Oko, watching the little protrusion, and feeling some heating up at the base of his own belly. (Aidoo, 1991:6)

Esi’s acceptance to marry Oko was nothing more than gratitude towards him. Besides, both her mother and grandmother were getting worried and uncomfortable with the fact that she had remained single when she ought to have been married. Nana, Esi’s grandmother indorses Esi’s status of not being able to love and her words of caution are proven right in the life of Esi, because according to Nana:

Love? ... Love? ... Love is not safe, my lady Silk, love is dangerous. It is deceitfully sweet like the wine from a fresh palm tree at dawn. Love is fine for singing about and love songs are good to listen to, sometimes even to dance to. But when we need to count on human strength, and when we have to count pennies for food for our stomachs and clothes for our backs, love is nothing. Ah my lady, the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves.” (Aidoo, 1991:42)

At the beginning of the novel, Esi encounters Ali Kondey, who is later to play a prominent role in her life as her second husband. Esi’s achievement and success status frustrates her husband Oko and his state of anger and discontent can be clearly seen through this passage:

“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! Esi had never stated it categorically that she didn’t want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever. (Aidoo, 1991:8)

Indeed, empowered with financial independence, Esi may be trying to claim power over her own self that traditionally belongs to Oko, the male. In the pursuit of authority, self-respect, and pride as a man, Oko rapes her.

The natural consequences for Esi’s action, the divorce, is a vacuum. This brings Ali Kondey, the handsome well-travelled managing Director of Linga Hide Aways, travel and tourist agency to the scene. He knew clearly how to win Esi’s heart. Their love could be seen as reciprocal:

“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 ...” (Aidoo, 1991:74)

Indeed, Esi’s ability to force Oko to leave her house demonstrates that despite the constraints that are clearly imposed on her through marriage and through societal expectations regarding women's roles, she in fact enjoys a greater sense of independence and freedom than many women in Africa or the West. However, it must be noted that Esi’s ability to assert her independence is contingent on her economic status and is not an option for the majority of women in similar positions. As Nana, her grandmother says to her when she decides to marry Ali

Leave one man, marry another. Esi, you can. You have got your job. The government gives you a house. You have got your car. You have already got your daughter. You don’t even have to prove you are a woman to any man, old or new. You can pick and choose. (Aidoo, 1991:108)

Nana’s advice to Esi clearly reveals that marriage is not beneficial to women but rather is the means by which women are detrimentally made the property of their husbands. As she says:

My lady Silk, remember a man always gained in stature through any way he chose to associate with a woman ... a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man. . . My lady Silk, it was not a question of this type of marriage or that type of marriage . . . it was just being a wife. It is being a woman. . . . When we were young, we were told that people who were condemned to death were granted any wish on the eve of their execution. . . . Anyhow, a young woman on her wedding day was something like that. She was made much of, because that whole ceremony was a funeral of the self that could have been. (Aidoo, 1991:109)

Since Ali now has two wives, each will explicably be free of the total attention that would have been a real source of worry in a monogamous home, especially where the wife combines motherhood with office work. Indeed, this is good news to Esi. As Buchi Emecheta proposes in the book *African Literature: An Anthology of criticism and theory* (2007), Esi becomes:

“Settled in her new life ... her basic hopes for marrying a man like Ali had been fulfilled. Ali was not on her back every one of every twenty-four hours of every day. In fact, he was hardly ever near her at all. In that sense she was extremely free and extremely contented. She could concentrate on her job ... Now she had almost lost the harassed feeling that had attacked her every late afternoon of every working day: that she had to hurry home, or to the market or the shops to buy something, or do something in connection with her role as a mother, a wife and a home-maker.” (Emecheta, 2007:166)

However, not long after their marriage, Ali rarely visits Esi’s residence. For him, home is where Fusena, the wife of his youth and children reside. Esi now burns with love and yearns for Ali’s visits and attention without success. Indeed, for a woman who has always wished for freedom from masculine domination and control of a woman universe, she, after a while begins to desiderate companionship and emotional dependence. Esi starts to endeavor a redefinition of their relationship.

From then on, she becomes sensitive to his lateness, his lack of concern, and his attitude of stopping by at her house only to later leave for his first wife and children. Her second marriage becomes an utter shame and she is a total wreck. Esi’s personality radically changed and she becomes reduced to a hysterical paranoid such that she has to see a doctor who prescribes diazepam which she takes in order to be able to sleep. Indeed, it is at this of agony that Ali with his inherent strong and aggressive masculine pride comes and presents her with a brand-new maroon car as a New year gift. This last, is just an excuse to cover up his inadequacies, his inability to be with her every time. Moreover, she has understood that she is only a second wife, a spare, her house and herself will always remain for him as an ancillary status.

As a female character, Esi is the epitome of the unsettled, hesitating female who lacks the strength to decide on an issue and carry it through. On one hand, it can be seen from her first marriage that she could not allow the denudation of her personal identity; she just wanted

to be socially visible. On the other hand, her second marriage, with all free time and personal space, she still wants to enjoy the benefits of a family set-up.

From the beginning of the novel, Esi faces many obstacles that curbs her to achieve her liberation, being a woman in Africa is not easy. She finds difficulties of adaptation not only in her house, but also at work where she is in internal conflict because she is forced to take secretary's work that makes her angry. She cannot endorse the fact that the African woman is made to take the subsidiary role or considered as the weak sex, she finds it difficult to agree with the stereotype of the African woman imposed by patriarchy. In fact, Esi finds herself as she is regressing against her will despite her education. what is noticeable is that the male counterparts of Esi at work place did not ask her to do the job, but ignored it knowing that she will do it in all cases. In this situation, it can be seen that there are changes in woman's role at work places and thanks to her education, she places herself to the same place as her male counterparts. Moreover, she chooses to divorce, prioritizing her career and willingly entering a polygamous marriage with Ali kondey which ultimately becomes an exchange of one set of challenges for another. A woman like Esi, who has been already tainted by her increased efficiency and financial independence through her own wherewithal and exertion, now she will look upon the matrimonial partnership as a kind of contest with the ambition to become the head of the family.

Esi's alienation from the society that she lives in has marred her relationship with all those around since they do not understand or even tolerate her life choices. Her relationship with her both mother and grandmother weren't that good due to her western education, but mostly because she belongs to the new generation since they fear all changes related to women and their liberation. Her disconnection from her mother and grandmother, Esi tried to find love

by entering in a polygamous marriage. Moreover, her fear of loneliness and the pressure of the society, she went against her principles and finally finished Alone without love.

Esi can be seen as not totally liberated but alienated from her society and more exactly the geographical place that she lives. She failed to adapt or even tolerate the rules that govern the patriarchal African society, and the price she has paid for her modernity is too high.

It can be said that in terms of female characters, Ama Ata Aidoo in this novel has created in Esi a character that epitomizes virtues of Western feminism. This version of feminism is evidently unsuitable in Africa. What fashion of love or marriage would prove adequately sufficient for Esi? From Oko to Ali, although both exhibit distinct lifestyles and attitudes, both fail to satisfy her idealism, and at the end of the novel she is more alienated than she was at the beginning because she is too idealistic about marriage.

V. Conclusion

This dissertation has allowed us to explore and to analyze the issue of women's positions and roles in contemporary Ghanaian society. Through our work study, one may understand that being a woman in Africa is not easy, especially in a patriarchal society.

The first chapter has provided us with a better understanding of the role of black women in the modern African society. Indeed, the female characters such as Esi, Opokuya and Fusena have been seen fighting not only against the unjust traditions that favor men, but also, they struggle for estimation of their abilities and for an equal part in guiding their marriage. Despite the fact that society is cruel, however, some women succeed to become courageous, audacious and outrageous who turned their struggles and pains into power to regain their liberation.

In the second chapter of our work, we have demonstrated the dilemma and the difficulties of African women who are caught between traditions and modernity. On one hand, the first category of these women are Nana, Esi's grandmother and her mother. These latter are traditionalist women who consider patriarchy and male dominance as natural and tend to accept it without complaining. Whether they are victims of their environment or not, they support patriarchal values and accept sexist oppression within their families. On the other hand, the second category of these women are Esi, Opokuya and Fusena. These latter represent the modern African woman. In spite the fact that men put obstacles and do everything and anything to keep them under their control, these latter do not give up and always develop strategies to resist patriarchy. Both Esi and Opokuya pursuit to build marriages and relationships that permit them to harvest the benefits of their education by exercising free wills, without making them overworked.

Through creating two independent female characters, the author challenges the patriarchal structure and reject the idea that women are weak creatures, emotional, passive, submissive and subordinate.

However, in the last chapter which has been devoted to the central character Esi, Ama Ata Aidoo has created in Esi a character that epitomizes virtues of Western feminism. This version of feminism is evidently unsuitable in African society. What a fashion of love or marriage would prove adequately sufficient for Esi? From Oko to Ali, both exhibit distinct lifestyles and attitudes. Both fail to satisfy her idealism. Furthermore, due to the pressure of the society, she went against her principles and ends up alone without love. Esi couldn't achieve her liberation because of the many difficulties and obstacles that she has faced in her life. She has found herself chained to the traditions that are imposed by the society. Indeed, it can be said that she is not totally liberated but alienated from her society. She has failed to adapt or even tolerate the rules that govern the patriarchal African society and the price she has paid for her modernity was too high.

To conclude, *Changes: A Love Story (1991)* communicates a resounding message: because women face difficulties to make their own choice since they are always under the shadow and control of their husbands, families and society. They can't achieve true freedom and happiness in their familial and social roles, intellectually, physically and sexually. Indeed, the novel hints indirectly at the misunderstanding of the role of women in the post-colonial African society. It exposes the difficulties that these women face when they come to make their individual choices about their personal and professional lives. Moreover, Ama Ata Aidoo's feminist attack is mainly against patriarchal conventions such as stereotypes regarding desire,

control, marriage and education; and the old women who do not see the need for change but rather frustrates the efforts of other women who are ready for change.

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