LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research, 8(3), 122-148, 2011
ISSN: 1813-2227

A Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of Aidoo's Novels and Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts a comparative analysis of the thematic and stylistic representation of womanhood in Ama Ata Aidoo's novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes: A Love Story*, and collections of short stories, *No Sweetness Here* and *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*. Some of the recurrent themes in Aidoo's fiction include the non-glorification of marriage, the offer of divorce as an alternative life-style, the reversal of the abandonment story, liberated women as leaders in the decolonization process. The study also reveals that Aidoo exploits stylistic reversals in her fiction where new shades of meanings are attached to old terms and the female character's change from the language of acquiescence to that of revolt and self-assertion, thus reflecting her growth from docility and conformity to liberation. The journey motif and structural divisions symbolize the landmarks in the stages of development of each female character towards liberation. The various forms of plots replete with flash-backs and interior monologues reveal the complexities introduced into the already culturally subjugated condition of the contemporary African woman's life through colonialism and urbanization. The setting reveals that there is steady progression in the degree of self-assertion of female protagonists from the non-literate situated in the rural areas to the educated and well-sensitized in urban centres. The technique of female friendship or collective female solidarity serves as a therapeutic tool for women's survival and retention of sanity in the face of patriarchal subjugation. Woman is represented by Aidoo as a more rational, resilient and considerate individual than man, thus revealing that Aidoo exploits the deflationary technique in depicting most of her male characters. Aidoo envisions a world of sisterhood among all women which could serve as a stepping-stone to world peace.

INTRODUCTION

A comparative analysis of the thematic and stylistic representation of womanhood in Aidoo's novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes: A Love Story*, and collections of short stories, *No Sweetness Here* and *The Girl Who Can*

and Other Stories, reveals unique feminist reversals of the patriarchal creative tradition.

Definition of Terms

Theme: According to M. H. Abrams, this is a term more usefully applied to an abstract claim or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader. Some critics claim that all nontrivial works of literature, including lyric poems, involve an implicit conceptual theme which is embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery. Since theme is usually used interchangeably with motif, it becomes imperative to define the second term.

Motif: According to M. H. Abrams, a motif is an element, - a type of incident, device or formula – which recurs frequently in literature. For example, the "loathly lady" who turns out to be a beautiful princess is a common motif in folklore.

Stylistics: According to M. H. Abrams, since the 111950s, this is a term applied to a method of analyzing works of literature which proposes to replace the "subjectivity" and "impressionism" of standard criticism with an "objective" or "scientific" analysis of style of literary texts.

Style is identified in the traditional way by the distinction between what is said and how it is said, between the content and the form of the text**.** The content is usually denoted, however, by terms such as "information," "message," or "propositional meaning," while the style is defined as variations in the way of presenting this information which alter its "aesthetic quality" or the reader's emotional response.

Theoretical Framework

Using the formalistic qualified by the feminist theory and practice of literary criticism, this study attempts a comparative analysis of the thematic and stylistic representation of womanhood in Ama Ata Aidoo's novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes: A Love Story*, on the one hand, and collections of short stories, *No Sweetness Here* and *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories,* on the other.

Summaries of the Novels

Our Sister Killjoy is an attempt by a modern, educated, African woman to wrestle with the realities of the modern experience especially as it relates to Europe. Sissie, the protagonist of the novel, undertakes a trip to Europe to sharpen her consciousness and highlight the oppression of women, Africans

or the black race in general, and other underprivileged people the world over. The journey is cyclic, starting from Africa to Germany and London, and back to Africa. Sissie comes to realize from her various journeys, and from the ill-treatment she receives abroad, owing to racial discrimination, that natural differences of sex, race or colour could always be an excuse for oppression. She observes: "Someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean" (13).

In ***Changes: A Love Story,*** Esi, a master's degree holder and head of the Federal Unit of Statistics, marries Oko, a school teacher, out of gratitude. Whereas Esi's job has a higher pay packet and fringe benefits like a car and a house, Oko's does not. They have a daughter, Ogyaanowa who spends her holidays with her paternal grandmother. Esi decides to exercise birth control without her husband's consent. She places greater premium on her official job than on her domestic duties as a wife. After Oko's brutal rape of Esi she decides to divorce him, and starts having sexual fun with another more loving married Muslim with a French background, Ali Kondey. Unfortunately, after their polygamous marriage, the love wanes. Esi puts up with Ali only as a sexual partner and no longer as a husband.

Summary of Short Stories in *No Sweetness Here*

"The Late Bud," may be interpreted as the late revelation of the mutual love between the mother, Maami Benyiwa, and her daughter, Yaaba. The theme which is growing up female in a sexist environment reveals that Yaaba, sensitive to the prevailing sexual injustice around her, attempts to flout existing convention to gain her autonomy. Even though she hates to be restricted by patriarchal inhibitions of the girl–child, she still cares for her mother's love, and still wants loved to be called "My child", the way her mother referred endearingly to her sister Adwoa, who went willingly on errands for all the women in the compound. In an attempt to give her mother a surprise, she has a home accident. Yaaba decides to go with the twins, her playmates to obtain red earth from the pits that night for varnishing the floor at Christmas. As Yaaba gropes in the dark for a hoe and a head-pan, she stumbles and falls, spilling a big basin of water and fainting inside the tray. The women in the family compound and neighbourhood rally round to resuscitate her, thus depicting a typical village setting where African women's atavistic roles and indigenous African culture have not yet been eroded by colonization.It was then she realized that her mother loves her enough to call her "my child" just as she usually refers to Adwoa, her sister.

Summary: "For Whom Things Did Not Change"

Zirigu, a cook-steward in a government guest house in a suburb discusses with his wife some of the incidents of human degradation and violation of

women by the African elite and other members of the society. They are disillusioned because from pre-colonial lords, through Muslim or religious lords, the colonial masters to the prevalent African elite, all of them degrade their subordinates and violate women. Fortunately, there is hope in Kobina the current guest in the guest house who is an exception. So, Aidoo demonstrates through Kobina that all hope is not lost and that the society can be transformed.

Summary: "Everything Counts"

African students abroad discuss the need for a revolution owing to the colonial mentality of accepting everything European as superior to everything African,. The only female student in their midst, Sissie, although sympathetic to the cause, makes an excuse for wig-wearing as time-conserving. The men get so furious that they seem to want to destroy her. However, because she is beautiful and intelligent, they let go. She also ignores them realizing that they, too, are guilty of refusing to return to Africa, and dating white girls. Sissie concludes her studies, gets married to Fiifi, one of her African brothers, and returns to Africa before him. She notices the craze about wig-wearing. Right from the air hostess to the typist in the office, all the university students in Sissie's class and the contestants at a beauty contest, all wear big and long wigs, and bleach their skin in an attempt to look European. Unfortunately, they end up with multi-coloured patches on the face and neck.

As Sissie visits her relations in the village, they too exhibit a colonial mentality by wondering aloud whether Sissie has brought back a worth-while car and a fridge. She would have liked to tell them that those commodities are like ropes or chains around the necks of Africans which enslave us to the whites. When she realizes that the determinants for the most beautiful girl at a beauty competition are based on how close to European and not African looks, because a mulatto is picked as the winner, Sissie weeps for a long time vomiting out of disgust. This is a story of an educated woman's contribution to the decolonization process. Sissie, Aidoo's surrogate, exhorts her male counterparts to return to Africa to contribute their quota in its decolonization, in stead of remaining in self – exile abroad. Unlike her male counterparts who are only interested in their personal welfare, Sissie prefers to return to Africa to join in nation - building. She shows a good example by trying to maintain her natural complexion and African culture and attempts to instill self – confidence in her students, her relations in the village and all around her to prefer their natural looks and African culture.

Summary: "In the Cutting of a Drink"

This story is an eye-witness account of the narrator who has just visited Accra, and his impressions of the physical features in the city and manners of the city dwellers. He was sent to Accra to look for his sister, Mansa. He

found her in a night-club as a prostitute whereas he was hoping that she was married to a big man in a big mansion and had children. Village communal values are different from city compelling constraints to survive. The narrator marvels at the bright city street lights wondering who pays for them, the crowd of human beings, the large size of the dance hall. He is shocked that Duayaw's woman should call for a beer, or alcoholic drink whereas he asks for lemonade, a non-alcoholic drink. He marvels at the city dwellers' manner of dancing which he concludes is like that of the white colonialists. Gradually, the narrator starts getting acculturated into city life and manners. First he is persuaded to sleep in the afternoon, then to eat with a woman, and to eat a strange meal which is not of his ethnic group. Now, he is persuaded to attend a night-club, drink beer, and to dance a strange dance with a woman he has never met before. The way the narrator stares or gawks at the single girl with whom he dances at the night-club suggests that he himself is getting sexually aroused. Even if he has the money to have sexual intercourse with her, he would go away without losing his honour. Yet the girl is branded a prostitute. The narrator is not ashamed that he is beginning to yield emotionally to the prostitute. He still talks disdainfully about the girls in the night-club whom he refers to as "bad."

Summary: "**The Message**"

After losing her only son, Kojo Amisa, in the World War overseas, Esi Amfoa senior may have advised her grand-daughter, the only daughter of her late son, to get married and have children so that the family's lineage might not get annihilated. Esi Amfoa senior, after whom her grand-daughter is named, receives news that Esi Amfoa junior has been opened up during child-birth by the doctors in Cape Coast. Fearing that her grand-daughter is dead, and ignoring the risks of travelling at her age, and the taunting by the driver and passengers, she courageously embarks upon the journey to Cape Coast to retrieve the body of her grand-daughter before it is used for instructions in the hospital, or buried dishonourably like a pauper's. Her anxiety over her grand-daughter's survival is twofold _ her grand-daughter's own life, and the continuity of the family lineage. Esi Amfoa senior initially thanks God for her pregnant grand-daughter and later says this of her when it is feared that she is dead:

> Hmmm … it's me has ended up
> like this. I was thinking that
> everything was alright now (39).

On her arrival at Cape Coast, she not only finds the grand-daughter alive but delivered of identical twins. Esi Amfoa senior almost gets hysterical with joy. Aidoo postulates that this aspect of socialization which presents marriage as the ultimate goal for every woman is erroneous. She asserts that all women, including mothers and grandmothers, should be educated enough and better

exposed to different types of life ambitions or professions so that they could proffer them to their daughters. Marriage should be only one of the options or alternatives of a woman's choices in life, not the sole and ultimate goal.

Summary: "**Certain Winds from the South**"

In the short story, "Certain Winds from the South," the theme is encapsulated in the title. It is the theme of wife-abandonment by husbands who frequently travel south in search of jobs as if they were blown by "certain winds from the south." Following the economic crunch after the introduction of a cash economy during colonization, most husbands in the hinterland have to travel south in search of a salaried job. The mothers and grandmothers remain responsible, reliant and resilient, looking after the family as pivots or anchors to the African family system. In this story, Issa, Hawa's husband, abandons her and their ten-day old baby, Fuseni, to the care of Hawa's mother, M'ma Asana. Issa goes south in search of a wage-earning job even if it means the cutting of grass, since his Kola business is at a lull because the kola harvest that season is poor. Issa's departure and abandonment of his responsibility to his family reminds M'ma Asana of her own husband who abandoned her and baby Hawa when she was only three days old, to go and fight other people's war. Even though Hawa's father did not need to become a soldier to earn a living because Hawa's grandfather was wealthy, the former left for adventure because joining the army was in vogue. He thus abandons his family and never returns, as most men in these short stories often do. He leaves the passive immanent and routine roles of rearing and nurturing babies, as the society believes, to women _ this time to his wife who is Hawa's mother. As for Issa, he cannot afford even goat-meat for his wife, a nursing-mother, since his father does not own any life-stock. In spite of the burden entrusted upon her, M'ma Asana resolves thus to take care of and preserve her family, particularly since Hawa is her only child:

> I am going to market now ….Today even if it takes all the money,
> I hope to get us some smoked fish, the biggest I can find, to make
> Us real good sauce (55).

M'ma Asana's resolve to preserve her family in spite of the men's abandonment of their familial responsibilities to her is for the survival of her family's lineage. This also demonstrates women's transcendence of their tragic condition and positive contribution to the society even in the rural areas.

Summary: "A Gift from Somewhere"

The story, "A Gift from Somewhere," is about a mother who, in an attempt to protect her son from a father's blow, receives a severe lash that injures her and leaves an indelible scar on her inner arm. The first two babies of Mami

Fanti die mysteriously a few days after birth. She experiences a new dawn with the visit of a Mallam _ a diviner, soothsayer or fortune-teller and natural psychologist _ to the village. He prophesies that Mami Fanti's sick child will not die. Her faith in the Mallam restores her son's health, so she names him Kweku Nyamekye, meaning a gift from God. For her dying son to survive, the mallam instructs her to abstain from meat and fish on Fridays and Sundays, and rather eat crabs and prawns until Nyamekye clocks ten, when he should take over the observance of the taboo. At the appointed time, she neither stops nor discloses the taboo to her son, Nyamekye, for fear that he might want to join her in the observance, particularly as she envisions him to become a great scholar. Mami Fanti's love for her son is demonstrated through the self-mortification of observing the mallam's taboo, initially alone and later on behalf of her son after age ten. Nyamekye, unknowingly, reciprocates his mother's love by setting traps to catch crabs and prawns for her on her days of abstinence. Unfortunately, Nyamekye's father who no longer loves Mami Fanti probably because prior to this time, she could not give him surviving children, and who now prefers his new wife, does not approve of the special treatment given to Mami Fanti by their son Nyamekye. He rains severe lashes on him for being of service to his mother. Mami Fanti intervenes, but receives the most severe lash which injures her and leaves an indelible scar on her inner arm. This confirms the Ibo axiom that a mother's love is supreme or unfathomable. The story paints a grim picture of what is supposed to be the joys of motherhood. It also confirms the postulation by Aidoo that the traditional concept in Africa is that the birth and survival of the child is entirely the woman's burden. The story seems to point out that in Africa the joy of motherhood is tainted by pains and scars caused or aggravated by husbands.

Summary: "Two Sisters"

Mercy, a typist in a government office, is unhappy that she has not yet found one of the young graduates as a boyfriend to be giving her a ride to and from work. She rules out the possibility of dating her boss for fear of his wife. She dismisses the possibility of accepting a relationship with one of her suitors, Joe, the taxi-driver, because he is not rich. She starts dating a fifty-year-old Parliamentarian, Mensar-Arthur, who buys her gifts like a new pair of shoes, a hand-bag and a wig. When mentioned to Connie, Mercy's senior sister, she disapproves of the relationship with the old Parliamentarian, but suggests a young enough suitor like Joe to whom Mercy could get married. When Mercy goes out that day with Mensar-Arthur, they make love on the back-seat of Mensar-Arthur's car by the sea-side, and she informs him that Connie knows about their relationship and does not approve of it. He promises to buy for her from London whatever Mercy discovers that she needs most. Mercy suggests the motor of Connie's sewing machine, and he fulfills his promise. He also procures for Mercy a house in the government estate, as promised,

and Mercy moves into it. When Connie complains to her husband, James, he sounds excited and is ready to make the best use of the opportunity to get himself a new car from abroad and to obviate his wife's transfer for sometime after delivery. Then the coup strikes and James does not get his new car. Connie's baby arrives. Mensar-Arthur is jailed. Mercy vacates her house and goes to stay with her friend. One day, she brings a male friend of hers to Connie and James. She gives his name as Captain Ashey, the head of an investigative panel of the new regime. Unlike in the village where marriage is enforced, Mercy adopts deliberate concubinage in the city to make ends meet since she is only a poorly paid typist.

Summary: Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral.

Auntie Araba who is sent to the city to stay with her aunt gets impregnated by her aunt's husband and is sent back to the village. However, prior to this, she has learnt bread baking. In the village, her mother, Kuma, treats her with love and care until she is delivered of the baby, Ato. Auntie Araba continues her bread baking in the village and uses the money to look after her husband Egya Nyaako and her son whom she gives a good education. When Ato is about completing his primary school, his father who has no other son by his wife claims him and takes him away from Auntie Araba. He sends Ato to a post-primary institution as promised but spoils him with too much pocket money. Auntie Araba does the same when Ato comes home to the village on holidays. In turn, Ato impregnates Mansa, a school-girl. Owing to the trouble raised by Mansa's father, Ato stops coming to the village on holidays. Auntie Araba takes in Mansa and treats her like her own daughter until she puts to bed. She requests that Mansa goes back to school, but Mansa's father loses interest in her education. Auntie Araba teaches Mansa how to bake, and they both live happily hoping that Ato would come and marry Mansa. Eventually, Ato breaks the news that he is getting married to another girl in town whom he has again put in the family way. Auntie Araba sends Mansa to her friends who admit her into their big baking business in the city. She makes a lot of money which she sends home to her mother to take care of herself and the baby. With Mansa gone, her husband dead, and Ato taken away from her, Auntie Araba gets so disappointed with Ato's refusal to marry Mansa that she pines away to death. This story of Auntie Araba is told on the way to her funeral by two sympathetic interlocutors as indicated by the title "Something to Talk About on the way to the Funeral."

Summary*:* "Other Versions"

The narrator, Kofi, on completion of his School Certificate Examinations, decides to remain in town for a vacation job. He is invited by his friend Bekoe to stay with him in an uncle's house. The latter welcomes both of them and offers them free accommodation and free meals. His wife chooses to modify the offer by asking them to contribute no matter how small an

amount towards their up-keep in order to teach the teenagers how to budget in future. The teenagers discuss the anticipated negative reactions of their mothers if they dared reported Bekoe's auntie-in-law to her husband. As an an educator and initiator of the younger generation into the people's culture, Kofi's mother advices him to remit a small part of his first salary home for his father to buy gin and pour libation to his ancestors for Bekoe's protection and prosperity. On bringing home his first pay, Bekoe is disappointed that the money is given to his father and not his mother who has sacrificed so much for the family's up-keep. On his mother's request, he continues the financial remittance to contribute towards paying his sisters' school fees. When he travels to America for further studies, he visualizes his mother in every subjugated woman he meets like the African-American woman at the Merrow's who prepares the meals while Mrs. Merrow receives the compliments, or the poor black woman whom he meets in the subway. Kofi offers her the equivalent of the four pounds that his mother rejected from him back home. On the latter's realization that Kofi is a student, she too turns down Kofi's offer in the same spirit of humility, self-effacement and self-sacrifice as Kofi's mother. She is truly another version of Kofi's mother.

Summary: "**No Sweetness Here**"

In the title story, "No Sweetness Here," Kwesi, an extremely handsome boy, attracts the attention of the young female teacher, called in Fanaticized English Chicha, who is posted to the village primary school in Bamso. Kwesi's parents, she learns, are virtually divorced. Chcha gets to know closely Kwesi's mother, Maami Ama, a woman whose beauty is beginning to wane, owing to the stress in her life. She is a miserable wife in a polygamous marriage who has only one child. When Kwesi clocks two and no other baby appears to be forth-coming, Maami Ama's husband, Kodjo Fi, abandons her and marries other wives who, in conjunction with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, insult and taunt Maami Ama. Her husband seeks and is granted a formal divorce when Kwesi attains the age of ten. In spite of the matrilineal system, the child is given to his father for custody. As the women in Kwesi's paternal and maternal families quarrel over his rightful custody, the boy gets bitten by a snake on the football field in school. Coincidentally, he dies on that same day, the traditional festival of Ahobaa which is in honour of Ahor, the man who gave his life to save his people from a pestilence. Could the gods have taken Kwesi's life too in atonement for the sins of his people like Ahor?

Summary of Short Stories in *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*

Lice Sissie, a mother of two and a wife to an irresponsible husband who sleeps out, attempts to wake up on a Saturday morning, but is too overwhelmed by her problems to face the world. The more Sisse tries to

count her blessings, as taught to her during her formative years, the more her problems surge upon her mind. Her injured son cannot be taken to hospital because her husband sleeps out with the car. As she speculates on her son's issue, her five year old daughter insists she should scratch and pick out lice from her hair. Overwhelmed, she pours drops of petrol on her daughter's and her own hair contemplating suicide, even though initially she means to cure the lice-itching with kerosene. Mother and daughter are inadvertently saved by her injured son's cough because she quickly steps in the lit match as soon as she hears her son's turning in bed. "Lice," narrated by the third person omniscience, represents the negative impact which the complexities of the corrupt post–colonial society and political system have on less-privileged Africans, especially women.

In **"Payments,"** Ekuwa Esuon, the fish-monger who represents all the less-privileged and oppressed Africans, especially women, spits into the face of the haughty fish customer who claims to be the wife of the most important man in the region and represents all the corrupt leaders and elite of the post–colonial African society. By revolting against the corrupt African leadership and elite, Ekuwa Esuon is championing the cause of all the poor. Aidoo tends to be in favour of this revolt because the less-privileged people, especially women, have to bear the brunt of the corruption in the society. Ekuwa Esuon now has to bear all the financial burdens of the family since her retrenched husband has not been paid his already earned salary.

In **"Comparisons,"** Aidoo demonstrates how gender myths are up–dated and perpetuated by husbands in the subjugation of their wives. In this story, Here, two different generations of men treat their wives in virtually the same manner, and attempt to denigrate them using almost the same humiliating language or expressions. The comparison is between the narrator's father and her husband. Both do not participate in house–chores, but instead, allow their wives to work alone. Her father does nothing in the morning but only takes his machete in his armpit to go to the farm, while her mother gets the children ready for school, prepares breakfast and the lunch which she carries along with some drinking water to the farm. Yet, her father, barely suppressing his irritation, calls her mother by her maiden name and says to her: "Esi Achin, what have you been doing ALL MORNING? Why are you women so tardy" (42)? Her husband treats her in virtually the same manner.

Choosing

Choosing is a story of a female writer's assertiveness in choosing a career, and a demonstration of discrimination against writers like refusing them access to a bank loan. The story is also an extolment of an African woman's wisdom as exhibited by the writer's mother. A female writer, although excelling in her writing career, on discovering that she cannot make ends meet, decides to lecture in the university. Her teaching is very good, but her worry about insufficient time to write her book makes her forgetful even in the midst of a lecture. She consults her mother who suggests a bank loan, but

she is refused one owing to a writer's lack of security and collateral. However, when she chooses to go into buying and selling, she is granted one. Yet she loses both capital and her initial savings as a result of her lack of business acumen. Upon another consultation, her mother advises her to engage in whatever career appeals to her most, but make that profession pay. In addition her mother tells her that she did not prevent her from buying and selling even though she knew that she was not going to succeed because mothers do not bring children into the world to solve all their problems for them, otherwise, life would not be worth living.

"Newly Opened Doors" represents the oppression of women by the white colonialists as well as by the post/neo-colonial African agents. A politician representing the narrator's district: promises the people "Newly Opened Doors" after Independence. Whereas the Africans fought the war of Independence to send away the imperialists, the African elite who succeed the colonizers continue to oppress the less privileged Africans, especially women. While four colonial soldiers rape the narrator's daughter and compel her to behead her husband, the narrator's superior boss copulate with a girl in his office at about 6 p.m. when the newly employed cleaner, this narrator, bumps into them because the door is left open.

In **"Heavy Moments,"** the society propagates the retrogressive myth that a woman should not wear trousers because they make urinating difficult. Going by that myth, Akuba would not have joined the military force, or else a different type of uniform would need to have been designed for her. Furthermore, she would not have realized her dream of flying a plane. In spite of all the discouragement from the society, and amidst contempt and ridicule from the male cadets, Akuba defies such a myth and remains in the Air Force. With determination, she successfully flies a plane on her final test day. When she succeeds, those same male colleagues herald her as "a jolly good fellow."

In the story, **"She–Who–Would- Be-King,"** after She–of–ten-years-old says to He–of–twenty–five–years-old that she would like to be the President of her country when she grows up, he reprimands her saying that she is mad and adds that he does not think the men of their country would allow her because she is a woman. Instead of feeling discouraged, she says with determination, "No? We shall see" (55). In the end, she becomes a Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Law, while her thirty–five–year–old daughter becomes not just President of their country but the President of the whole of Africa, the Confederation of African States.

In the title story, **"The Girl Who Can,"** Adjoa's grandmother, Nana, attempts to propagate the fallacious gender myth that any girl-child who does not have big strong legs or who has thin long legs like Adjoa cannot have babies because thin legs cannot support solid hips that can support a pregnancy. This is eventually proved wrong by Adjoa. Another bone of contention in the family is whether or not Adjoa should be allowed to go to school. Owing to Nana's prejudice, Adjoa is initially allowed to go to school

as a happy riddance because her legs are supposedly of no use for child-bearing. In the end, Adjoa turns out to become the best all-round junior athlete who wins the trophy. The irony is that her grandmother Nana gets so proud of her that throughout the sports week, she accompanies the pupils to school to watch Adjoa during the competition, and keeps admiring Adjoa's legs silently. It is Nana who eventually brings home the cup and shows it to Adjoa's mother before returning it to the headmaster.

In **"Her Hair Politics,"** an African female customer who is highly sensitized about global politics and international trade is repelled by the fact that the hair-piece which she is being persuaded to use in a hair saloon in Africa is real foreign human hair, purposely nurtured for sale. She refuses using the hair piece and declines from getting her hair dressed. Her revolt is against the colonial mentality of her fellow Africans who judge beauty based on foreign looks, and their naivety in accepting trifles like the glittering foreign hair piece or wigs in foreign trade, in exchange for the rich African natural resources which are allowed to enrich other nations while Africa is enpoverished. The expertise of the female artisan who is as dexterous in her hair-dressing skill as she is fluent and convincing in her propaganda to her customer is compared to an efficient advocate or lawyer who is capable of convincing her audience to see her point and even cause the magistrate or judge to marvel at her logic and eloquence.

"Male-ing Names in the Sun" is a story of triumph over neo-colonialism. A Fanti girl who is as rebellious as her imperially ungovernable Fanti ancestors leads some pupils to the parade grounds on Empire Day. After standing in the sun for hours while waiting for inspection by the colonial Education Officer, they refuse to sing the lyrics of the British anthem correctly. The grand–father of the girl in the sun was one of those tortured to death in prison for their resistance to imperialism. Kojo Kuma, the son of Kweku Srako, a boy from the village of Mowire in the neighbourhood of Oguaa is taken to Reverend and Mrs. Goodful in Cape Coast, a town noted for its complete assimilation of western culture, for proper up–bringing and a good education. He is baptized George, while his surname Srako is translated into English as Shillingson. The Reverend, thus, jettisons the African naming system and adopts the European system of naming people after one single male line. Many years after the declaration of political independence, Achinba a female architect and grand–daughter of the Fanti girl in the sun is about to get married to a medical doctor, a descendant of George Kojo Shillingson. When addressed by her intending mother–in–law as a future Mrs. Shillingson, the girl protests in the rebellious spirit of her Fanti ancestors. She accepts to marry the man but refuses to adopt his anglocized name. In stead she chooses to retain her own indigenous African name, Achinba. She, thus, teaches her fellow Africans by example to retain their African names and culture.

"Some Global News" opens with two generalizations which confirm that each group of people is seriously attached to its culture. In "Some Global News," a former university female lecturer, Yaa–Yaa, who travels very

frequently to the western world is very irritated by the arrogance and snob of the highly industrialized nations who refer to themselves as the First World, and to Africa as the Third World. This arrogance is assumed by even young people in these western countries. On the contrary, the people back home in Africa, including the youths who are supposed to be the hope of the future, are all using these same terminologies and internalizing the converse implications of inferiority and a lack of confidence in themselves and African culture. After Yaa–Yaa delivers a lecture in an American university, a white student asks her whether she agrees that the world is now a global village since youths of both the First and Third Worlds are said to be involved in the same types of problems like school drop–outs, teenage pregnancy, drugs and the like. This question of considering the world as a global village bothers Yaa–Yaa so much that she attempts on her return to discuss it over a meal with her friend, Kate. To Yaa–Yaa, the galloping post–colonial lack of confidence in African culture and everything African, and the loss of self–confidence are alarming and distressing. Drawing attention to the area of clothes, Yaa-Yaa reveals that people all over the world are very sensitive about their culture like what they wear and what they eat. In stead of respecting other people's views and cultures, the western world insists on making the rules, imposing its culture, and getting others to make the necessary adjustments so that everybody can live in the global village.

In the short story, **"Nutty"** Aku–Yaa, an educated African woman sensitizes her fellow Africans of the racism suffered abroad in the colonizers' home countries, so that the former can remain faithful to their African culture. The friendship between Blanche, a white American, and Aku–Yaa, an African woman encourages the bonding of women and the shunning of racism. However, Aidoo's message here is that women should not allow vices like racism and class to destroy their relationships, because bonding is necessary among all the women of the world, since women's subjugation is global.

About the Wedding Feast

This short story is a demonstration of people's intolerance of one another's culture even among Africans. Members of the families of a young intending couple meet to plan for the wedding feast. Whereas the grandmother of the would – be bride insists on following the procedure according to her culture and her daughter tells her that times have changed, the two mothers from different African cultures argue vehemently about the details of preparing a similar dish of spinach. The meeting ends in a stalemate. In the end each family prepares the meal according to its indigenous culture, and everybody enjoys both dishes.

"Nowhere Cool" As if to confirm the notion that the subjugation of women is global, Sissie, an educated African woman in "Nowhere Cool," travels to

the United States of America for further studies, and discovers that women's concerns on both sides of the divide are very similar, despite enormous socio-cultural differences. She exhibits courage in her decision-taking to leave her husband and two children behind in Africa. These two factors tend to be the areas of concern for married women both in Africa and in the United States, as revealed by the dissenting voices at her send–forth party back home in Africa and at another party on her arrival in New York. Her American female co- flight passenger who asks her to help look after one of her children has to commute between her station and her husband's to re-unite the family every weekend.

A Comparative Stylistic Analysis of the Novels and Short Stories

Whereas the female characters in traditional male-authored fiction usually serve as appendages to the male hero, all the protagonists or central characters in Aidoo's fiction are female. Although in the traditional fiction woman is confined to the home or the domestic sphere, the liberated woman in Aidoo's fiction breaks out of this confinement and journeys into spatial freedom. Each liberated protagonist, like Esi and Sissie of the novels, *Changes* and *Our Sister Killjoy* respectively, and Sissie of the short stories, "Everything Counts," "Her Hair Politics" and "Nowhere Cool," is depicted as a feminist pilgrim, defined through the journey motif by a quest for self-identity, achievement and self-actualization. This is how Katherine Frank puts it:

> Our heroine slams the door on her domestic prison, journeys out into the great world, slays the dragon of her patriarchal society, and triumphantly discovers the grail of feminism by 'finding herself' (14).

Movement, thus, becomes liberating for woman just as it is for man. It is through woman's exposure during her feminist pilgrimage that she succeeds in grappling with her subjugation and slaying the "dragon" of patriarchy. The growth or development of each of the liberated women is viewed in terms of a physical and psychological journey which normally starts from her domestic hearth or local abode, a symbol of her naivety and subjugation, to the metropolis in the context of her experience and self-definition. Esi of the novel *Changes* metaphorically journeys from the subjugation of her first marriage to Oko, through the marriage, on her own terms, to Ali Kondey, and finally to freedom and the defiance of convention by failing to formally get divorced from the second marriage. Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* journeys from Africa to the colonizers' metropolis and defeats her subjugators there, before returning to Africa. Sissie of the short story, "Everything Counts," like her counterpart in *Our Sister Killjoy* also makes a cyclic journey from Africa to the white man's land and back to Africa. She gains a lot of experience

about the colonial mentality of Africans both at home and abroad, racism and neo–colonialism by the new African elite who have replaced the former colonizers.

Adjoa, the protagonist of the title story, "The Girl Who Can," journeys from her village and her maternal hearth, where she is often ridiculed for the worthlessness of her thin legs, to the town where she goes to school. There, she slays the dragon of the traditional gender myth which subjugates her by putting her thin legs into better use in athletics. Finally, she returns with the cup for the best junior athlete, thereby putting to rest the contention about her legs. Akuba of "Heavy Moments," the first female to fly a plane in the Air Force Academy of her African country, and She-of–ten-years-old, the protagonist of "She–Who–Would–Be-King" whose daughter becomes the first President of the Confederation of African States, each makes a psychological journey away from subjugation, through determination and a strong will, to unprecedented achievement. Each of these liberated women slays the dragon of patriarchal subjugation. This manner of charting the liberated woman's growth lends credence to Maurice Shroder's assertion that the novel [read fiction] records the passage from a state of ignorance which is bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world (14).

Aidoo exploits structural divisions in her fiction to symbolize literary landmarks in the growth of the female protagonist on her way to liberation, achievement and self-actualization. The novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes* are structurally and symbolically divided into four and three parts, respectively, while the two collections of short stories, *No Sweetness Here* and *The Girl Who Can* are also symbolically divided into three and four parts, respectively. Each of the parts plots the stage of growth of each of the female protagonists towards maturation. For Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* and "Everything Counts," it is a pilgrimage from Africa, her home continent which defines her innocence and inexperience, to the metropolis of the former colonizers which represents the protagonist's gaining of experience concerning racism and the aftermath of colonialism. For Esi of *Changes* and Sissie the protagonist of "Lice," it is a journey from inexperience to maturation and finally to resignation. This symbolic structured exploration of Aidoo's female protagonists tends to validate Thomas H. Uzzell's contention that "all good art …is a celebration of experience" that generates "awareness" and "meaning" (30).

Each of Aidoo's central characters is imbued with what Nina Auerbach refers to as the "power of metamorphosis" (285). She undergoes a series of changes and arrives finally at a radical decision to control her destiny. In the short stories, this is true of Adjoa, the protagonist of the title story, "The Girl Who Can," who, to prove erroneous and fallacious the traditional gender myth that thin legs are useless because they cannot support a pregnancy, takes the radical decision to use her legs for athletics. She eventually wins the cup for the best junior athlete and the admiration of her initial critics. Akuba, the protagonist of "Heavy Moments" also undergoes a series of

experiences and changes and finally arrives at the decision to join the Air Force. In the end she flies a plane and, thereby, explodes the myth of women's exclusion from certain careers and socio-cultural practices.

In the novel, *Changes* and the short story, "Everything Counts," Aidoo exploits the technique of "the disillusion plot" in exploring Esi's and Sissie's characters, respectively. This is how Friedman Norman describes the disillusion plot:

> A sympathetic protagonist starts out in the full bloom of faith in a certain set of ideals and, after being subjected to some kind of loss, threat or trial, loses that faith entirely (165).

Esi and Sissie undergo this process of change and growth in their feminist development to self-discovery. After experiencing disillusionment, they transcend this stage to achieve maturation. Aidoo uses what Norman Friedman refers to as "the degeneration plot" in charting the destiny of the central character of the short story entitled "Lice," and that of the protagonist Esi of the novel, *Changes*. This is how Friedman Norman describes the degeneration plot:

> A character change for the worse occurs when we start with a protagonist who was at one time sympathetic and full of ambition and subject him to some crucial loss which results in his utter disillusionment. He then has to choose between picking up the threads of his life and starting all over again, and giving up his goals and ambitions completely. If he chooses the former cause, we have what may be termed "the resignation plot…" (163).

Esi in *Changes* decides to pick up the threads of her life and start all over again, after having been let down by marriage or heterosexual love in Oko and Ali. With regard to the story "Lice," the protagonist nearly gives up her goals and ambitions altogether, in the face of overwhelming problems, and attempts suicide, but is inadvertently rescued by fate in the restless turning in bed and cough of her injured son. Whereas the plots of many female African writers are linear, depicting the female protagonists' straight forward quest for self, majority of Aidoo's plots are cyclic. In the short stories which depict the atavistic roles of women, the plots reflect the repetitive life-style of the older generation in the younger, thereby demonstrating the waste in female uninspiring lives which do not aim at achieving much except the routine roles of marriage and motherhood. Aidoo's plots are replete with flash-backs and interior monologues, thus depicting the complexities introduced into the already culturally subjugated condition of the contemporary African woman's life as a result of colonialism and

urbanization. Her quest for self and autonomy seems, therefore, to be couched in a maze and embedded in the symbol of the journey from the context of patriarchal limitations to the autonomy of self.

Many of Aidoo's plots are embedded in apparent dialogue which could be compared to listening to a one-sided telephone conversation, where the second interlocutor's speech is deduced from its repetition, the rhetoric question, or reference to it by the first person narrator. A good example is found in the fourth part of the novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, entitled, "A Love Letter" where Sissie the protagonist appears to be holding a dialogue with her lover. A typical example in the short stories can be found in "The Message" where the grandmother, Esi Amfoa, on her way to Cape Coast, seems to be holding a dialogue with the people she meets on her way to catching the bus. Another example can be found in the story, "In the Cutting of a Drink" where the first person narrator seems to be involved in reciprocal exchanges or histrionics with his audience. As the narrator, Mansa's brother, reports his search for Mansa in the city, he calls for the cutting of a drink for him to clear his throat before continuing with the narration. His reaction in the following comment suggests that his mother must have made an interjection concerning her efforts to dissuade Mansa from dropping out of school:

"My mother, do not interrupt me, everyone present here knows you tried to do what you could by your daughter" (31). Therefore, Aidoo prides herself that her short stories are meant to be heard which implies that they are meant to be read aloud or to be dramatized through the voice medium.

To authenticate the liberated woman's assertiveness, Aidoo also exploits stylistic reversals in her fiction where new shades of meanings are attached to old terms such as "power," "sex," "marriage," "self," "hero," "protagonist," "politics," "space," "domain," "liberation," "independence," "woman," "womanhood," "autonomy," among others. There is a feminist idiolect designated by Elaine Showalter as "genderlect" which gives colour to the liberated woman's language, and which defines her feminist values. According to Marie Umeh, elaborating on this in respect of Buchi Emechta [which is also applicable to Ama Ata Aidoo]:

> [There is]… a whole new vocabulary in African literature written by women …For Emecheta, [read Aidoo] female discourse that breaks with convention is a political act of dissidence, a kind of abrogation. Here she creates a poetic discourse with a new meaning to her existing vocabulary by forcing words, such as "married woman" and "wife" and "husband" and "male" to lose their enticing and conventional connotations of joy and fulfilment (202).

The growth of the liberated woman from docility to conformity and eventually to self-assertion and non-conformity, "after eating the apple of experience," according to Wendy Martin, (226), is reflected in her change from the language of acquiescence to that of revolt and self-assertion. This is especially obvious in the characters of Esi of the novel, *Changes*, Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* and all the characters named Sissie in the short stories "Everything Counts," "Her Hair Politics" and "to self-assertion and non-conformity Nowhere Cool." Esi starts by docilely accepting to marry Oko as if he has done her a favour, since she was often ridiculed initially through a traditional gender myth that she was too thin to find a husband and to make a baby. Even in that act of apparent docility can be sensed some political act of abrogation from convention. Esi, thereby, conforms to convention that sets marriage as the sole and ultimate goal of every woman. Since the subsequent roles of wife and mother are subsumed in marriage, Esi also executes the role of mother by giving birth to her only daughter Ogyaanowa. With time, Esi metamorphoses from docility and conformity to self-assertion and non-conformity, after eating the apple of experience from the patriarchally inflicted injuries in her two successive marriages to Oko and Ali. Her growth and development are steady. After her divorce from Oko which is initiated by her, Esi still tries to conform to convention by turning her romantic love escapades with Ali Kondey into a kind of polygamous marriage. When Ali psychologically bruises her feelings through his philandering life-style, Esi chooses to continue to keep him just as a sex partner only, and no longer as a husband. Esi's refusal to formally divorce Ali is another act of defiance of convention. Esi chooses to relate to Ali on her own terms and not according to any established convention.

Esi, the protagonist of the novel, *Changes*, is by far more assertive than a character like Fusena, as evident from even Esi's language of revolt as against Fusena's language of acquiescence. Esi's feminist idiolect or "genderlect" depicts the degree of liberation she has acquired through experience which is by far greater than that of Fusena, a Muslim woman who attempts to realize herself by gaining financial freedom when she gets her husband Ali to buy her the biggest kiosk in the city of Accra. All the same, Fusena still defines herself within tradition by remaining married to Ali in spite of his philandering life-style. Even when Fusena realizes that the women in Ali's family have betrayed her by persuading her to accept polygamy, she still gives her consent for Ali to marry Esi as his second wife. That is when Fusena's idiolect of acquiescence is most obvious. She is so deeply rooted in her Muslim religious fundamentalism that it would require something as radical as feminism to extirpate her from such a mentality. Aidoo, therefore, proffers feminism for such mentally colonized women or individuals.

It is obvious that there is steady progression in the degree of self-assertion of female central characters from the grass-roots or rural areas to the urbanized, self-assertive, well sensitized, educated, analytical and liberated contemporary African woman. For instance, whereas Maami Ama of the title

story, "No Sweetness Here" acquiesces and accepts to be divorced by her husband, Kodjo Fi, when her son Kwesi clocks ten, and does not contest the judgment granting her husband custody of her only child, Esi of the novel *Changes* takes the initiative and divorces her first husband Oko. Even though Maami Ama displays some degree of feminist consciousness by not contesting the divorce and the release of her only son to his father, her language remains very acquiescent just like Fusena's of the novel *Changes*.

A Thematic Comparative Analysis of the Novels and Short Stories

Some of the recurrent themes in Aidoo's fiction are the non-glorification of marriage, the offer of divorce as an alternative life-style for any woman in an incompatible marriage, the reversal of the abandonment story, liberated women as leaders in the decolonization process, among others. Aidoo exploits the deflationary technique in the presentation of most of the male characters in her works, and the technique of female friendship or collective female solidarity as a therapeutic tool for the retention of women's sanity and survival, among others.

Unlike what obtains in the traditional patriarchal fiction, marriage is not glorified as the ultimate goal and sole ambition of every woman. In Aidoo's feminist fiction, marriage is viewed as only one of the alternative choices which a woman is free to make in life. For any failed marriage, Aidoo offers woman divorce, instead, as an alternative. This is evident in Esi's first marriage to Oko in the novel *Changes.* When the couple appears incompatible, Esi the liberated protagonist takes her destiny into her hands, takes the initiative and seeks a divorce. This is one of the reversals of the patriarchal literary tradition which Aidoo introduces to her feminist fiction. Similarly, in the title story, "No Sweetness Here," instead of remaining miserably attached to Kodjo Fi in a non–functional marriage, we find Maami Ama, a non-literate village woman and the mother of Kwesi, willingly accepting divorce and the custody of her only son by her husband. Since Maami Ama is not as liberated as Esi, we find her simply acquiescing to the divorce and not taking the initiative like Esi.

However, Linda Strong-Leek reveals the radical implications as Aidoo attempts to deconstruct African patriarchy as well as the new social order instituted by the colonialists and their African agents. Strong-Leek asserts that as the women represented in these short stories either challenge or succumb to the institutions and structures within which they live, and as they exist or refuse to abide within these confines, their reactions challenge the very organizations on which their societies are established (147).

The theme of abandonment is another that is common to Aidoo's short stories and novels. Whereas the abandoned woman like Medea, Dido or Ariadne in the European ancient or classical male-authored creative tradition is depicted as over-ridden with passion and, therefore, reacts violently when abandoned by her male lover, the reverse is the case in Aidoo's feminist

fiction. When abandoned by Jason her husband, for instance, Medea vengefully murders her two sons by Jason, her rival and King Kreon, her rival's father. Instead of reacting violently after she and her daughter Hawa are abandoned by their husbands, M'ma Asana of "Certain Winds from the South" naturally assumes the leadership role, by promising to feed her daughter and grand-child with a good meal in order to prevent her extended family from extinction. Even Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* sarcastically dramatizes her naivety in not reacting as expected of her by the society, when her lover who is residing abroad abandons her. She rather exhorts him and other African self-exiles to return to their home continent Africa and contribute towards nation-building and the decolonization process, instead of continuing to stay in the metropolis of the former colonizers. Woman is, thus, represented by Aidoo as a more rational and considerate individual than man. It is the liberated woman like Sissie who spear-heads the decolonization process back home in Africa, whereas man who was initially given preference in the acquisition of western education tends to be selfish and inconsiderate. He chooses to remain abroad on self–exile, where he seeks his personal comfort and forgets the common good of the generality of Africans.

This leads us to the theme of liberated women as leaders in the decolonization process. Whereas Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* and Sissie of "Everything Counts" attempt to re–orientate the mentality of their fellow Africans abroad to return to Africa, Sissie of "Her Hair Politics" embarks on the decolonization of the mentality of Africans in general, exhorting them to develop more confidence in themselves and their African culture, and learn to protect their economy and natural resources. In the same vein, Esi and Opokuya of *Changes* are seriously involved in the attempts to decolonize the mentality of the generality of Africans and the indigenous leaders to be more realistic instead of being hypocritical like the international agencies in dealing with women's concerns.

Conversely, the above mentioned stories and novels also deal with the issue of male self-centredness and self-exile in the colonialists' metropolis abroad after their studies there, thus emphasizing male selfishness, irresponsibility, chauvinism, fecklessness and exploitation of women. Most male characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's fiction are either one or two dimensional, and are usually flawed. This reveals that Aidoo exploits the deflationary technique in depicting most of her male characters. They are most often focused on illuminating the dilemmas confronting the female central characters. Their negative attitudes which antagonize or exploit the female protagonists are usually emphasized, and this makes them repulsive to feminist readers. This is true of Oko and Ali Kondey of *Changes,* and Sissie's unnamed and self–exiled lover of *Our Sister Killjoy,* whom we only hear about through Sissie. This fact is also applicable to most of the male characters of the short stories. They include Ato and his unspecified father who is simply referred to as that "Lawyer-or-Doctor-or-Something-like-that" in the story, "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," Hawa's husband Issa, and her father who abandon her and her mother when they are

nursing very tender babies in "Certain Winds from the South." Others include Kodjo Fi the husband of Maami Ama in the title story, "No Sweetness Here," and the brutish husband of Mami Fanti in "A Gift from Somewhere." Even when a male character like Ali Kondey of *Changes* is positively portrayed at the beginning of the novel, he is gradually allowed through the deflationary technique to degenerate into an irresponsible, chauvinistic philanderer who subjugates his female partners, while he soars on his masculine arrogance.

Aidoo's heightening of Ali's arrogance is to contrast it with the self sacrifice of his mother who dies in the course of giving birth to him, after having been sexually exploited by Ali's father, and after having suffered from similar male arrogance like Ali's. Nana Wilson-Tagoe attributes the imbalance in the representation of male/female characters by Aidoo or any female writer to the fact that her identification with the female protagonists may be so total that it may consume all her creative energies, leaving her with a fully realized heroine, and only blurred images of the male characters with whom she relates (85).

Male characters in Aidoo's fiction are made even more repulsive as a result of men's constant sexual exploitation of women, be it in the indigenous society in pre-colonial times, or in the urbanized society in the colonial or the post/neo-colonial era. For the pre-colonial, Zirigu of "For Whom Things Did Not Change" states that kings and lords violated very young girls, just as a Muslim like Ali's father does in the novel, *Changes*, and other Muslims still do. In the novel *Changes* Musa Musa, Ali's father sexually violates Fatimatu, Ali's mother and impregnates her as a child-bride at age fourteen, after which she dies at child-birth, during the birth of Ali. Also, Nana Esi's grandmother talks of lords and princes who married many wives according to their status. That means at every stage of human development, men always subjugate and sexually exploit women, especially young girls. To attest to this, Akuba of "Heavy Moments" is threatened with coitus by her mother's new husband if her mother insists that she should continue to live with them in the city. Similarly, Auntie Araba of "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" is sexually violated and impregnated by her guardian, the husband of her aunt with whom she was living in the city. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, the third-person neutral omniscient narrator in an interior monologue tells of the German slave-master who dis-virgins the young wives of his slaves or serfs on their nuptial night, as the young husbands watch with their manhood hurting (19).

In the story, "Newly Opened Doors," the first-person narrator autobiographically relates how her daughter Rufa is raped by four colonial assailants. Again, she narrates how she bumps, the previous day, into her most superior boss while he is having sex with a girl on a couch in his office at 6 p.m. Zirigu also mentions how the white colonial masters used to take very young African girls to bed, just as the new African elites, except Kobina,

still do in the government guest house where he works. Kobina, therefore, represents the hope of the new African elites.

As opposed to these chauvinistic irresponsible male characters, liberated female characters in Aidoo's fiction are represented as predominantly political beings in family and community life, in nation-building and in the decolonization process. This can be attested to from the African women's influence within the extended family like Nana Esi Amfoa in "The Message," and women's influence starting from the elaborate structure of the family compound, as in "The Late Bud," to the community life, like Auntie Araba's influence on her community in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral." The peak of woman's role as a political being is demonstrated in the novels and in those short stories where the female characters, most of whom are named Sissie, appear most liberated. They get involved in the decolonization of the mentality of their fellow Africans who have a colonial mentality, and exhort them to develop confidence in themselves and their culture, and protect their natural resources and their economy in foreign trade.

Aidoo, like most female writers, exploits female friendship or collective female solidarity as a necessary tool for women's liberation, survival and sanity. She traces this back to African ethos just like the women in "The Late Bud" who come to Yaaba's rescue after her accidental fall at night. It is because of this therapeutic quality of collective female solidarity or female friendship that most of Aidoo's protagonists survive or retain their sanity in the face of annihilative socio-cultural forces that could, otherwise, have destroyed them. The new woman en route liberation is, therefore, most often represented by Aidoo in therapeutic friendship, with fellow women, which affords her the psychological strength that aids her survival and transcendence of patriarchally inflicted injuries. The female community consciousness that redefines woman in her feminist quest for liberation, therefore, explodes the myth of female cantankerousness that is contrived to militate against women's solidarity.

Owing to negative socialization, women are often used as agents against themselves as individuals or as a group. As negatively socialized patriarchal constructs, women are generally, in the words of Emilia Oko, "unreliable friends and companions" (230) to one another. Owing to the innate human tendency of inhumanity to one another, and since men, from primeval times, have devised the divide and rule strategy to disunite women, set them up against one another, and use them as agents for the enforcement of patriarchy, women cannot generally, relate harmoniously with one another to experience the sublimities of true friendship.

Marriage is presented in Aidoo's fiction as one such strategy through which women are disunited, with each woman firmly installed under a man's scrutiny and control so that she does not out-grow the men in the society either economically or in influence. According to Debbie Taylor in *Women: A World Report*, it is believed that before the inception of marriage, like primates, a mother constituted the nucleus of each family, with the children, sisters and aunties surrounding her, and the men in the periphery trying to

court the women. Marriage is considered by many feminists, including Ama Ata Aidoo, as a means of dividing the female force that would ordinarily have existed to resist male hegemony. Each wife is subdued by her husband through historic and on-going gender myths that subjugate and subordinate her to him, as is evident in the story entitled "Comparisons," where both the narrator's father and husband use about the same gender myths and expressions to denigrate their wives, even when there is a generation gap between the two men. In *Changes*, Opokuya is subsumed by Kubi, her husband, through on-going myths. This intimidation from a husband helps to inhibit a wife from both physical and mental optimum performance, and could disunite a wife from other women. The African fore-mothers of pre-colonial times, discerning men's ploy to disunite women through such a sly strategy of misogyny as marriage, attempted to counter it by constructing parallel female structures like age groups and female solidarity groups through which women also exercised their own political power and conducted their economic and agricultural activities which affected not only their families but also the entire community, as observed in "The Last Bud."

The heroines in Aidoo's fiction survive or retain their sanity, despite the crushing socio-cultural forces that could, otherwise, have destroyed them, because of the therapeutic quality of a female community within the African ethos. With the erosion of such structures by colonialism, especially in the urban centres, Aidoo advocates the restoration of such bonding through female friendship like that of Aku–Yaa and Blanche which cuts across race in the story "Nutty," and between Yaa-Yaa and Kate who are both Africans in "Some Global News." Similarly, in the novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, there is female friendship which cuts across race between Sissie, an African, and Marija, a German. In *Changes*, too, there is female friendship between Esi and Opokuya who are both Africans.

It is that friendship which maintains Esi's sanity at the peak of her subjugation by her first husband, Oko, or by Ali, her second. It also helps Marija's survival, and maintains her sanity after her abandonment by her husband who has to work long hours to be able to pay their mortgage. Aidoo envisions a world of sisterhood among all women. Perhaps, that is why the ice is broken between Sissie of "Nowhere Cool" and her white female co-passenger who seeks Sissie's help to control her two children during the rain-storm on the plane. It is probably because Rufa, the raped daughter of the narrator of "Newly Opened Doors," does not have such female friendship around her during the war for independence that she loses her mind and remains mute for ten years since that rape and contrived murder incident. A lack of female community similar to the type existing in the village might be responsible for the attempted suicide by Sissie, the mother of two and wife of an irresponsible husband in the short story "Lice."

The physical, emotional and psychic traumas of the female protagonists elicit the reader's sympathy while the male characters in Aidoo's fiction do

not. In African feminism, the female writer is not opposed to the male as a sex. Rather she is against man as a misogynist and monster in marriage who subsumes and attempts to annihilate woman's identity, stifle her capabilities, autonomy and self, and prevent her from becoming an achiever in her own right. It is because Aidoo is not opposed to man as a sex that she depicts a liberated female protagonist like Esi in *Changes* to still relate on her own terms with a man like Ali in an exciting heterosexual love relationship, after her failed first marriage to Oko. Similarly, Sissie of *Our Sister Killjoy* relates with her unnamed lover whom she refers to as "My Precious Something," "My Love" and "My Darling," among other endearing nomenclatures. This non-specification of her lover's name suggests that Sissie could be referring to any of the self-exiled African brothers abroad whom she is exhorting to return to Africa for nation-building. To Sissie, each of her educated brethren abroad is like a scrap from a poor man's cloth which the tailor cannot afford to throw away (62). That imagery in *Our Sister Killjoy* is allegorical. Africa is the poor man, while his scrap pieces of cloth are the self-exiled educated Africans abroad whom Africa cannot afford to lose as a result of a colonial mentality and brain drain.

In the short story depicting the highly sensitized woman on the way to liberation and autonomy as the protagonist of "Everything Counts," the central character, Sissie, gets married to her African boy friend abroad before returning to Africa ahead of him. This proves that Aidoo is not opposed to the male as a sex, even though, Sissie is neither tied up to him nor her movement conditioned by his. In the same vein, Sissie of "Nowhere Cool" is already married in Africa before she leaves her husband and two children to go for further studies in America. This detachment from lover, husband and children which affords the liberated woman the opportunity to still realize her dreams is what Aidoo is advocating for all contemporary African women.

Another mark of African feminism which is different from western feminism is child friendliness. The African liberated woman like Esi in *Changes* still identifies with her child Ogyaanowa, even after her failed marriage to Oko, her first husband. Sissie of the short story "Nowhere Cool" also identifies with motherhood and her two children whom she leaves behind in Africa to study abroad. In the case of Esi, Aidoo might be using her situation to state that a failed marriage may alienate a woman from her former husband, but it does not destroy her love for her child. This is because Aidoo, through African feminism, is conscious of the importance of children as the basic structure of the community and of future generations both as leaders and as citizens.

Most female African writers refuse to be addressed as feminists, for as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie states: "Male ridicule, aggression, and backlash have resulted in making women [writers] apologetic, and have given the term 'feminist' a bad name" (11). However, Ama Ata Aidoo admits whole-heartedly that she is a feminist, and asserts:

> African women today are caught between the western feminists with imperial biases and the African male leadership, whose nationalist impulses have also incorporated Victorian notions of womanhood. Over the last five hundred years we've had African men in leadership positions, certainly since Africa's collusion with the Western world to oppress African women. Isn't it clear that the African man alone isn't able to cope with our relationship with the West and the rest of the world (Medium, 33)?

This reveals radical implications as a result of which Aidoo attempts to deconstruct African patriarchy as well as the new social order instituted by the colonialists and their African agents. This is better asserted in the words of Linda Strong-Leek that as the women represented in these short stories either challenge or succumb to the institutions and structures within which they live, and as they exist or refuse to abide within these confines, their reactions challenge the very organizations on which their societies are established (147).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals unique feministic reversals of the patriarchal creative tradition. Unlike in male-authored literary works, all the protagonists in Aidoo's fiction are female. Each liberated woman breaks out of confinement and journeys into spatial freedom. Depicted as a feminist pilgrim, she is defined through the journey motif by a quest for self-identity, achievement and self-actualization, slaying the dragon of subjugation and patriarchy. The charting of the liberated woman's growth records the passage from a state of ignorance to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world. Exploiting the various forms of plot, structural divisions, degrees of language assertiveness, and setting or progression from the rural to the urban, Aidoo demonstrates the degree of maturation and self-assertion of each female protagonist.

Some of the recurrent themes include the non-glorification of marriage, the offer of divorce as an alternative life-style for any woman in an incompatible marriage, the reversal of the abandonment story, liberated women as leaders in the decolonization process, among others. Aidoo exploits the deflationary technique in the presentation of most of the male characters and the technique of female friendship or collective female solidarity as a therapeutic tool for women's liberation, survival and sanity. The study also reveals that in African feminism, the female writer is not opposed to the male as a sex. Rather she is against man as a misogynist and monster in marriage who subsumes and attempts to annihilate woman's

identity stifle her capabilities and prevent her from becoming an achiever in her own right. Unlike western feminists, but just as other African feminists, Aidoo advocates child and male friendliness. With the erosion of female parallel structures by colonialism, especially in the urban centres, Aidoo advocates the restoration of bonding through genuine female friendship which cuts across race and culture. Aidoo envisions a world of sisterhood among all women which might serve as a stepping-stone to world peace.

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